

London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)

The Sexual and Intimate Life of UK Austerity Politics

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Gender Studies of the London
School of Economics and Political Science for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy. London, July 2018.

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the role of sexuality and intimacy in austerity politics in the UK since the formation of the Coalition Government in 2010. Conceptualising austerity politics as a broad political, cultural, and economic formation, it interrogates some of the key ways in which sexuality and intimacy are embedded within the discursive and regulatory functioning of austerity. Each of its three case studies examines sexuality and intimacy within a different discursive and/or regulatory site, including policy discourse, media discourse, and processes of policy implementation and service delivery. The cases studies focus, specifically, on the sexual and gendered assumptions embedded in austerity discourse; the limited narrative possibilities available for sexualised and racialised subjectivities in circulations of austerity discourse within popular media; and the materialisation of neoliberal penalisation in sexual and intimate lives as a series of intimate disruptions.

In enquiring after the kinds of sexual and intimate lives, subjects, and politics that are made (un)imaginable, (il)legible, or (il)legitimate by and within austerity politics, central to this thesis is the claim that austerity politics has a *sexual and intimate life*. It focuses on non-identitarian forms and modes of sexuality and intimacy, examining them through the frameworks of sexual inequalities, sexual subjectivities, and intimate disruptions. Finally, as well as intervening in epistemologies of sexuality, this thesis also explores the consequences that the embeddedness of sexuality and intimacy within austerity politics has for conceptualisations and understandings of the political.

Acknowledgements

Like most (writing) projects, this thesis could not have been written without the kind and generous help, support, and feedback of many others. First and foremost, I must thank my incredible supervisor, Professor Clare Hemmings, whose always astute and thought-provoking feedback has shaped my thinking in incalculable ways. As well as her generous critique, over the past four years Clare has provided me with a more supportive environment than I could have ever hoped for, in which I could not only grow as a scholar but also begin to believe I could, indeed, be(come) one. My adviser, Dr Ania Plomien, also deserves special thanks. Her feedback and support – always delivered in a kind and caring manner – particularly in navigating the economic and policy fields, have been invaluable. My endless gratitude also goes to Hazel Johnstone and Dr Kate Steward, who are the heart and soul of the Department of Gender Studies at the LSE. Both of their kindness and practical and emotional support have extended well beyond their job descriptions, and at times – particularly in the final year of my PhD – literally sustained me through the process of writing this thesis.

My experience at the Department would have also not been the same without Dr Leticia Sabsay and Dr Sadie Wearing, who have provided me not only with generous support in teaching, but also with many important moments of support, guidance, and laughter. As well as everyone above, I want to thank Dr Marsha Henry, Professor Diane Perrons, and Professor Wendy Sigle for reading and commenting on my work at various points during my PhD. I am also indebted to all the staff and visiting scholars at the Department for creating such an intellectually stimulating and crucially important space within the LSE and academia more broadly, and to all my students at the Gender and Sociology Departments at the LSE for both their insight and their trust.

Numerous other people have also contributed to the intellectual life of this thesis, as well as sustained me in writing it. Dr Jacob Breslow has been my best friend and confidante since we did our master's degrees together at the Gender Department, and without his unparalleled kindness and care I simply would not have made it all the way here. From his

generous critique and the numerous life-sustaining conversations we have had, to the countless meals he has cooked and haircuts he has given me – his support has been invaluable and extended much further than the term ‘friend’ suggests. I am also extremely happy that I got to share the journey of writing, and especially finishing, this thesis with the amazing Jacqui Gibbs and Ilana Eloit – both of whom have (slowly but surely) become such important friends and colleagues to me. To Jacqui, I am also thankful for the many conversations about austerity (and everything else) that have given me both intellectual and emotional sustenance, and for embarking with me on the pleasurable journey of working collaboratively on something important to both of us; and to Ilana for her unmatched confidence in her friends, and for her wonderful sense of humour. Thanks go also to Billy Holzberg, who has also become a dear friend and whose sense of social justice and willingness to listen I admire; and to Dr Emma Spruce and Dr Maria Alexopoulos, both of whom I greatly look up to. I also want to thank the many other (past and present) colleagues with whom I have got to share great conversations, collaborations, and drinks: Louisa Acciari, Melissa Chacón, Jenny Chanfreau, Dr Marina Franchi, Julia Hartviksen, Aiko Holvikivi, Dr Magdalena Mikulak, Magda Muter, Tomás Ojeda, Priya Raghavan, Dr Amanda Shaw, Dr Nicole Shephard, Leonie Taylor, and Hannah Wright. Special thanks also to Jacob, Melissa, Neal, Aiko, Billy, and Tomás for their proofreading assistance.

Apart from the community I have had the pleasure of partaking in at the Gender Department, the process of writing this thesis has also been greatly enhanced by two other communities I belong to: London Rollergirls and particularly all my teammates have truly been a lifeline, especially in the final months of finishing this thesis; and London’s community of boatwomen has provided me with much-needed respite and kindness. I have so much love and appreciation for all of my friends and, as well as everyone above, I want to especially thank Annette Behrens, Milo Bettocchi, Jarkko Virtanen, and Henna Örn for their support.

Last but not least, I want to extend my gratitude to everyone in my family, and in particular my mum Anne Mäkinen for always believing in me,

and for instilling in me both her love for knowledge and her determination to live a political life. Most importantly, Jazmyn Sadri deserves my boundless love and appreciation for all the innumerable ways in which she has sustained me over the past four years – thank you for loving me, for teaching me about priorities, and for always coaxing me to be my best self.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of all four of my grandparents – Maila and Yrjö Lehtonen, and Kirsti and Sakari Mäkinen – who all in their own ways struggled with and against the boundaries of what a legible and legitimate (working-class) life looks like, and who would have all been immensely proud of this achievement.

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Introduction

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Origin Stories

In a small city in Finland in the 1990s, my not-very-well-off family of two (my mother and I) lived in a relatively affluent (upper) middle-class area, surrounded by families with recognisably better access not just to financial security, but also to various kinds of middle-class cultural capital. I grew up well cared for, but at the same time intensely aware of the differences between my friends' families and mine. These differences materialised over time and became known to me in our divergent access to hobbies and leisure activities; in our knowledge of different kinds of foods and food cultures; in the amount of time our parents were able to give to us alongside their jobs and other commitments; and, much later, in the different degrees of access we had to information regarding higher education and what it meant to study at university – perhaps signalling the importance of considering not only economic but also cultural and social capital in determining class position and location (Bourdieu 1984). In addition to these differences that functioned to mark belonging to particular class categories, however, I knew we were also different because of the *nature* of our families.

Surrounded by families that much better matched classed expectations about what a legible and legitimate family looks like – two parents, two children, two cars, a pet, and a summer house – my family, headed by a single mother in receipt of benefits, at times unemployed, and

with no father in sight, certainly attracted more than a few raised eyebrows. The status and legitimacy of my family and particularly of my mother seemed to always be in question more than those of other families and of other mothers. This 'questioning' included the doubts raised at my primary school about my mother's ability to raise a child who could do so well at school; my close friend's insistence that it was not possible my parents were not married when they had me; and, perhaps most acutely, the concerns my friend's mother whispered to me at a sleepover regarding my mother's new (much younger) partner moving in with us – what did I think of it, was I safe, was it appropriate. I grew up knowing – if not cognitively, then certainly affectively – that my mother's choices regarding reproduction, sexuality, and intimacy were frequently deemed questionable, if not outright wrong, by others in our community.

I detail some of the experiences of *sexual regulation* I both witnessed and was subject to in my childhood not in order to centre myself in this thesis' analysis, but instead to highlight the origins and the implications of this project beyond its particular scope – that of UK austerity politics, conceptualised in this thesis as a broad economic, political, and cultural formation, with internal logics, implications, and impacts that reach far beyond the field of policy (as I discuss in more detail below). My interest and investments in both enquiring after and challenging the suturing of sexuality to the political economy in multiple and varied ways originate in these early experiences. Central to this thesis is, thus, the claim that austerity has a *sexual and intimate life* – as indicated by its title. It interrogates the multiple, sometimes distinct and sometimes overlapping, ways in which sexuality and intimacy are enmeshed in the political and cultural functioning of austerity politics, focusing, in particular, on the discursive and regulatory aspects of these entanglements. The central question that this thesis attempts to answer is: what kinds of sexual and intimate lives, subjects, and politics are made possible, legible, or legitimate – or, indeed, *impossible*, *illegible*, or *illegitimate* – by and within austerity politics? In what follows I argue that sexuality matters a great deal to the functioning, legitimacy, and futurity of austerity politics and that austerity

politics, conversely, matter to both experiences and understandings of sexuality and intimacy.

While my awareness of the processes of sexual regulation mentioned above was at the time limited to their materialisation in my day-to-day life, these everyday interactions and moments of judgement, concern, and disapproval no doubt had their counterparts in national media and political discourses, as well as possibly in policy frameworks – as is the case in the austerity context. These experiences, thus, highlight some of the ways in which the discursive and regulatory mechanisms associated with political and economic formations can permeate the *everyday*. The – often, but not always, relatively minor – ways in which processes of sexual regulation reverberate through the daily lives of those subject to them are part of a larger fabric that ties sexuality and its regulation together with understandings and discourses of social welfare, class, and the political. Importantly then, and as I discuss in more detail below, sexuality and intimacy are here understood not as centrally sutured to the homosexual/heterosexual distinction, but rather as encompassing a broader field of sexual and intimate judgements, assumptions, subjectivities, and relations that bear a significance to political economic processes.

Conversely to this intuitive and affective sense I had of the interconnectedness of sexuality to class and the political economy, however, for a long time I was completely unaware of the role of race and racialisation in these processes. Thinking now, retrospectively, I can see that the family of my only non-white classmate was subject to similar – but of course in some key ways different – sexualised regulation, judgement, and disapproval, which I was blind to due to my own limited social location and positioning. Thus, while engaging in research that holds a long-standing personal significance to me has led me to view this project as epistemologically and politically urgent beyond its particular – temporal and geographical – location, at the same time these experiences also mark some of the limits of my *intimate* understanding of the processes under analysis here. Race, racialisation, and racism certainly carry their own regulations of sexuality, intimacy, and the family, which are often as intrinsically connected to the

political economy as processes of classed regulation are. This thesis, thus, also looks at the overlaps and linkages between racialised, gendered, and class discourses – and specifically the ways in which these discourses function to regulate sexuality and disrupt intimate lives.

This discussion of my personal experiences also serves to highlight that the issues examined in this thesis are at the same time specific and *not* specific to austerity. As I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, the post-2010 context of UK austerity politics is both noteworthy in its specificity and almost mundane in its continuation of the much longer-standing processes of welfare retrenchment and neoliberalisation more broadly; both a rupture in certain discursive and regulatory processes and a perpetuation of others. The suturing of sexuality to the political economy in the austerity context is also, therefore, both specific to that particular context and potentially applicable to a much wider variety of geographical and temporal locations. My detailing of the not entirely dissimilar processes of sexual regulation I witnessed and experienced in a vastly different context – with different political economic arrangements, a different kind of welfare state, and different dominant cultural formations – is, thus, intended to highlight the continuities and similarities in sexuality's deployments in relation to welfare, class, race, and the political economy across varying times and places. However, as my choice to frame this thesis as an enquiry and intervention into the deployment and regulation of sexuality specifically within the context of austerity politics indicates, there is also something specific about the discursive and regulatory relationships between sexuality, intimacy, and the family, on the one hand, and austerity as a political and cultural formation, on the other.

Each of the three case studies that together form the core of this thesis pertains to a different discursive and/or regulatory site – policy discourse in Chapter 3, media discourse in Chapter 4, and processes of policy implementation and service delivery in Chapter 5. In this thesis, examining the 'sexual and intimate life' of austerity, thus, encompasses a wide variety of discursive and regulatory arenas, as well as, importantly, a number of different understandings of sexuality and intimacy. In the case of

Chapter 3 this entails enquiring after the ways in which sexuality features in the increasing familialisation and culturalisation of social policy that have accompanied austerity, specifically around (child) poverty discourse and policy. The notion of ‘cultural poverty’ echoes my own experiences above, as often it was specifically my (single) mother’s ability to pass the right kinds of *cultural* values and norms on to me that was questioned by others. Discursive framings of poverty position family form, and relatedly the sexual and reproductive decisions of poor mothers, as the subject of both increasing attention and regulation, indicating that processes of sexual regulation tend to be closely related to normative judgements around what makes a *family* (il)legitimate or (in)appropriate.

It also entails asking questions about which subjects and subjectivities are made (il)legible or (il)legitimate in austerity discourse through processes of sexualisation and racialisation, specifically in relation to the circulation and reproduction of the ‘benefit scrounger’ figuration within media sites (Chapter 4) – suggesting that the formulation of classed subjectivities is always already indexed by sexuality and race, as well as, for instance, gender. Specifically, it is racialised and sexualised subjects who tend to be deemed furthest away from classed notions of respectability – as the questioning I was subject to as a child about my mother’s choice of partner suggests. Finally, it involves investigating the various ways in which the regulatory processes associated with neoliberalising austerity politics disrupt intimate – and not just sexual – lives, relations, and spaces (Chapter 5), indicating certain shifts in the public/private division – although perhaps not in the ways often assumed in neoliberalising contexts. The processes by which state actors increasingly intrude in the private sphere suggest that this sphere tends to materialise as more fragile and less protected in the case of marginalised populations. The lives of these populations tend to, thus, always be deemed slightly more *public* than those of others – as evident both in these processes of state intrusion and in the discursive frameworks that mark the intimate lives of marginalised populations as the subject of intense public scrutiny and judgement, as indicated, again, by my own example.

Sexuality is here conceptualised variously through the notion of sexual inequalities, as sexualised subjectivities, and as pertaining to intimacy more broadly, as Chapter 2 discusses. Altogether these conceptualisations point to the importance of studying sexuality beyond identity formations. Thus, apart from arguing that sexuality is key to understanding austerity politics – as well as other, related and unrelated, economic and political formations such as neoliberalism/-ation and the state, as highlighted in Chapter 1 – this thesis also deliberately probes and pushes at the *epistemological boundaries* of sexuality itself. The overwhelming emphasis in sexuality scholarship on questions of identity and subjectivity – although important matters in their own right – has the unintended consequence of masking some of the many other ways in which sexuality operates – and, indeed, matters to and in political and economic considerations – beyond the inclusion (or exclusion) of LG(b) or sexual minority subjects.¹ Consequently, in this thesis my focus is explicitly on *non-identitarian* forms of sexuality and sexual regulation – although, importantly, this thesis does not constitute the *limits* of such an investigation. As I explain in more detail below, the case studies here have been chosen because of their salience to austerity, and specifically to austerity as a cultural and political formation – a process that is necessarily not only subjective, but also exclusive of many other ways of thinking austerity and sexuality together.

Finally, my brief discussion of my own experiences points at the political commitments and investments that have guided this project from its conception. My acutely felt sense that something was not right about the ways in which other people frequently made assumptions about and passed judgement on my family and our way of life gradually gave way to a more familiar and easily recognisable set of political engagements – framed, in significant part, through sexual identity. These engagements with sexual identity or LG(b) politics had a name and a legitimate avenue for action and they allowed me to inhabit a recognisable – and, at least to an extent,

¹ Throughout this thesis, I use the phrasing ‘LB(b)’ to indicate the frequent lesser inclusion and consideration of bisexual subjects in many formulations of sexual politics, as well as to suggest the continuous tendency to frame sexual politics as sutured to the homosexual/heterosexual distinction.

legitimate – political subjectivity for many years. Neither my own early frustration with, nor my mother's refusal of, the judgements we faced, conversely, had a name, an activism attached to it, or a legible or legitimate way of inhabiting a political subjectivity. These frustrations and refusals were simply *illegible*, not only as sexual politics, but also as politics at all. This thesis as a *political* project, thus, continues the work of many others in attempting to give these frustrations and refusals a name, and in enquiring after potential avenues for political action and possible political subjectivities that might follow from them. As I discuss in more detail below, I intentionally name these enquiries as an exploration of *sexual politics*, in order to highlight that such a politics intervenes not only in the related political economic processes, but also in sexuality itself. Claims to sexual politics that, perhaps, flow more easily from specific, predefined, and easily recognisable sexual (and gendered) subject positions are, thus, decentred from the outset in this thesis' analysis.

In the rest of this introductory chapter I focus, firstly, on the overall research site of this thesis – that of austerity politics. While explicit deployments of austerity in the rhetoric of politicians and policymakers have significantly decreased since the end of the Coalition Government in 2015 and particularly since the replacement of David Cameron as Prime Minister with Theresa May in 2016, in this section I make the argument that austerity bears a political and cultural significance beyond the period in which it was explicitly promoted in policy discourse, thus conceptualising it as a *future-oriented* political and cultural formation. The second section broadly outlines the gaps in literatures this thesis intervenes in, as well as introduces the key theoretical framings both employed and developed in the rest of this thesis, its methodological approach, and its scope. Thirdly, I briefly explore the question of sexual politics more explicitly, and, finally, this chapter closes with a more detailed description of each of the subsequent chapters.

(Still?) Austerity Politics

In November 2017 the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (Portes and Reed 2017) published an interim report on the impact of tax and welfare reform in the UK between 2010 and 2017, following a seven-year period of what this thesis terms *austerity politics* in the UK. Austerity politics is here, in the first instance, conceptualised as a policy formation comprising the wide-ranging array of cuts and reforms in various areas of state provision, implemented by the Coalition (2010-2015) and Conservative (2015-) Governments – explored in more detail in the next chapter. Most obviously these cuts and reforms have taken place in the area of social welfare, but arguably the framework of austerity could also be seen to include the numerous recent changes to, and reductions in, state provision in areas such as healthcare, education, housing, immigration, legal aid, taxation, and Local Authority (LA) funding. The EHRC report also follows and responds to the repeated refusals by both the Coalition and the Conservative Governments to track and report on the *cumulative* impact of welfare reform, thus disproving the Governments’ insistence on the impossibility of such a task (SSAC 2014). In line with the argument made by many others (Beatty and Fothergill 2013; Fawcett Society 2012; Hall et al. 2017; Pearson and Elson 2015; Sandhu and Stephenson 2015; Women’s Budget Group 2010), the report’s findings suggest that the impacts of austerity both have fallen, and will most likely continue to fall, disproportionately on the poorest and most disadvantaged in society – whether in relation to gender, race, class, locality, or disability, for instance.

As well as a policy formation, however, increasing scholarly attention has been directed at austerity as a *political* and *cultural* formation. The numerous recent studies that have focused on the cultural and discursive mechanisms deployed to justify austerity measures²; on the potentially far-reaching future consequences of these deployments (as I explore below); and on the incorporation or co-optation of identity politics, or a politics of

² On these cultural and discursive mechanisms, see Chapters 2 and 3, as well as, for instance, Bramall (2013), Clarke and Newman (2012), Jensen (2014), Jensen and Tyler (2015), Negra and Tasker (2014), Tyler (2013), and Wiggan (2012).

difference, within neoliberal or austerity discourse³ – many of which are examined on subsequent pages of this thesis – attest to the importance of viewing austerity through a lens that encompasses not only its policy impacts, but also its cultural and political impacts, implications, and underpinnings. I follow many of these interventions and take as my starting point the assumption that austerity measures are not the necessary solution to the existing and self-evident problems of economic crisis and spiralling public debt, as they have tended to be presented in the rhetoric of politicians (Cameron 2009; HC Deb 2010: cols 166-180). Instead, I direct my focus at the discursive and regulatory mechanisms that have not only (re)produced the current time as one of exceptional crisis, but also installed a set of ‘exceptional’ measures – primarily, welfare retrenchment and increasingly disciplinary social policy – as the solution to the supposedly widespread issues of cultures of poverty and irresponsibility, and a ‘broken society’ (Cameron 2009; Conservative Party 2010). Rather than through the frame of exceptionality, then, austerity is here viewed as an opportunity to, and a vehicle for, deepening neoliberalisation, as Chapter 1 centrally argues.

The cultural and political mechanisms that have been deployed time and time again to justify austerity and intensifying neoliberalisation are reproduced in policy discourse and frameworks, but also in media and visual cultures. Cultural products play a part not just in helping forge public opinion, but also in legitimising certain worldviews over others and in enabling and constraining political imaginaries – as do the discursive tropes and framings found within policy processes. A significant part of the cultural life of austerity is the reproduction (or, at times, the contestation or reworking) within the cultural field of the political messages presented in policy discourses surrounding austerity. In addition to these reproductions, however, austerity as a cultural formation has a life of its own that extends beyond the policy field. Many scholars have analysed the various frequently circulated *figurations* of austerity politics, from the ‘benefit scrounger’ (Briant et al. 2013; Garthwaite 2011; Valentine and Harris 2014), to the

³ On ‘narratives of difference’ in the austerity context, specifically, see Gedalof (2017). See also Duggan (2003) and Fraser (1996, 1997) for different takes on neoliberalism and equality or identity politics; and Rofel (2007) on neoliberalism and sexuality in China.

‘chav mum’ (Tyler 2008), and ‘benefits brood’ families (Jensen and Tyler 2015). These figurations form a key part of the discursive stigmatisation of welfare recipients within the context of austerity, but frequently the figurative tropes they reproduce have much longer histories than the current period of austerity – meaning that their reach, popularity, and affective intensity tend to exceed their deployments within austerity discourse specifically.

Austerity discourse, reproduced both in policy processes and through media and visual cultures, thus, plays a central role in justifying and legitimating further welfare retrenchment and deepening neoliberalisation in various areas of state provision. However, some scholars (Bhattacharyya 2015; Cherniavsky 2017) have questioned whether neoliberalising states are, in fact, interested in consent at all – and the way in which neoliberal logics have tended to be presented as technical and instrumental solutions devoid of politics, as others (Bourdieu 1998; Duggan 2003; Dunford and Perrons 2014) have suggested, certainly seems to support this view. Irene Gedalof argues, conversely, that consent does matter to austerity politics in the UK, as austerity discourse seeks to evoke a desired viewpoint representing ‘the good citizen as an aspirational neo-liberal subject who embodies a project of independent self-actualization without relying on the state’ (2017: 13; cf. Tyler 2013). Yet, these discursive logics may – despite their seeming oppositionality – function in cooperation with each other. While the discursive tropes of irresponsible ‘benefit scroungers’ and ‘intergenerational cultures’ of worklessness and disadvantage, among others, help justify welfare retrenchment and ‘reform’ specifically, the presentation of austerity not just as a set of *technical* solutions, but also as the most *effective* solution, functions to position austerity as inevitable and commonsensical. The suggestion that austerity is inevitable – because it just *makes sense* – in turn, underpins austerity’s hold on the everyday, as a ‘mood’ or ‘atmosphere’ (Coleman 2016), as well as conditions its hold on the future.

Rebecca Bramall argues that part of austerity’s power arises from its ability to install particular futures – in terms of ‘both the material

constraints that fiscal tightening endows the future and the ways in which people living with austerity have begun to *imagine* their own and others' futures' (2016: 1, emphasis in the original). Austerity urges us – and, importantly, *some* of us considerably more than others – to modify our anticipation of the future, to scale back our expectations of the kinds of lives we imagine ourselves and our families living in the future, as many others (Adkins 2015; Bhattacharyya 2015; Coleman 2016; Hitchen 2016; Jensen 2012) have suggested. This urging is often felt in the everyday, not just in terms of increasing financial constraints, but also as an overall *mood* of pessimism and hopelessness, as Rebecca Coleman (2016) suggests. The futurity of austerity is, thus, here seen as affective as well as temporal. This temporality, according to Coleman, is not linear; austerity futures do not unfold in a linear manner from the present, but instead it is the austerity present that is conditioned and shaped by an austerity future that has not yet arrived – and may, in fact, never arrive. Austerity, seen thusly as a future-oriented political and cultural formation, therefore, also has the potential to significantly impact upon the ways in which we are able to respond to its logics and rationalities, exerting influence not only on our affective responses today, but also our political responses tomorrow – as I argue throughout this thesis.

Austerity's capacities to both modify futures and shape the present functions partially through the unravelling of past promises and partially through the offering of new expectations in their place. The processes by which the post-Second World War social contract, premised on an expectation of the universality of the welfare state and an assumption about the reciprocity of the state/citizen relationship, is being withdrawn or unravelled are *accelerated* – although not initiated – by austerity politics. However, it is important to note that this unravelling is by no means complete, nor is it as straightforward as I have suggested so far. The promises embedded in the post-war (welfare) state have not been entirely dismantled and replaced by new, lower expectations of the state and the state/citizen relationship. Instead, as Lauren Berlant (2011) and many others (Bramall 2016; Latimer 2013) coax us to see, these expectations live

on in many ways, continuing to be the object of complex attachments and investments – even in situations where these promises are the least likely to continue to deliver in the future, as Berlant (2011) suggests in her conceptualisation of ‘cruel optimism.’ Indeed, I would argue that these two modes in which austerity operates as a future-oriented formation and a ‘technology of power’ (Foucault 1979) can coexist – we may continue to attach to the future in a relation of cruel optimism, continuing to invest in the promises of an already-dismantling social contract, while at the same time *feeling* pessimistic in the present, in response to austerity’s urging of us to modify our expectations.

Berlant’s account, thus, also provides a way of viewing austerity’s consent-seeking logics together with the rationalities that have sought to present austerity as inevitable, and therefore as beyond both criticism and politics. Gargi Bhattacharyya bases her argument about austerity’s divestment from issues of consent on the notion that due to limited possibilities for identification with austerity narratives and a resultant ‘shared consciousness of precarity’, ‘there are limited opportunities to take active pleasure and consolidation of self from the abjecting representations of unfortunate lesser beings’ (2015: 38). For her, for abjection to work as a mechanism of consent-creation, part of the population needs to be stable enough to identify as different from those abjected – such as the ‘benefit scroungers’ referred to above. However, Berlant’s (2011) argument suggests that while precarity may, indeed, be ‘shifting up’ in the context of neoliberalising austerity, notions of normativity continue to have a significant hold on us – and particularly on those of us for whom attachments to normativity have in the past helped guarantee certain (welfare) state protections. Thus, perhaps what abjection requires is not actual stability but the façade of stability, or a continuous belief in, and an attachment to, (future) stability. As well as embodying intense individualism, Gedalof’s ‘good citizen as an aspirational neo-liberal subject’, thus, also depends on such attachments – to normative notions of ‘stable’ family life and the reciprocity of the state – as I argue centrally in Chapter 3.

Austerity is, thus, here seen as incorporating multiple different kinds of discursive and cultural logics and political rationalities, suggesting a complex web of attachments to imaginaries of both a diminished future and a future where the state will continue to care and provide for us. While some of us are told that austerity is not only necessary but also inevitable, at the same time the demonisation of certain subjects and families for their reliance on the welfare state helps ensure support for welfare retrenchment on the part of those who continue to believe that *they* will remain protected – a tension I explore in more detail in Chapter 4. Given austerity’s capacity to both constrain future imaginaries and at the same time sustain them in complex ways, it is no surprise that opinion polls assessing the public’s approval of austerity measures reflect this complexity. In answer to the YouGov poll question – ‘thinking about the way the government is cutting spending to reduce the government’s deficit, do you think this is good or bad for the economy?’ – the proportion of respondents replying ‘good’ increased from 2012 until the 2015 election but has been dropping since, with the responses to whether the spending cuts are ‘fair’ following a somewhat similar pattern (Dahlgreen 2016). These responses possibly reflect the reduced emphasis on austerity in political discourse since the election and particularly by Theresa May since she became Prime Minister. However, as Gedalof (2017) cautions, the discursive deployments of ‘hardworking families’ and of national ‘crisis’ – this time brought upon or indicated by the European Union referendum – continue largely unchanged in May’s rhetoric, perhaps suggesting the perpetuation of austerity – discourse and politics – in all but name.⁴

In relation to the public’s assessment of the *impact* of austerity, however, the picture looks slightly different. The proportion of people who say that the cuts are having an impact on their own lives has been steadily decreasing since 2011, while the proportion of those who say they are not

⁴ The framing of the EU referendum as the ‘new’ crisis to which the Conservative Government has to respond to is suggestive of the tendency for neoliberalisation to (re)produce endless crises and, therefore, to create the conditions for an endless need for ‘reform’, as suggested by Clarke (2004), Jones and Novak (1999), and Peck (2001), among others.

having an impact has been increasing (Dahlgreen 2016). Further, the proportion of people who think the cuts are 'necessary' has consistently been higher than those who say they are 'good' or 'fair', although a drop in these numbers can also be observed since 2015 (*ibid.*). These results indicate, firstly, that – despite some concern about 'fairness' – public support both for the cuts themselves and for the Coalition's narrative of *necessity* has remained relatively constant, as well as relatively high. Secondly, they suggest that the impact of austerity is, perhaps, *felt* less intensely as a consequence of austerity's temporality. If one expects to be feeling worse in the future, does feeling worse when that future arrives continue to register as an impact or an affective shift? Or does austerity's urging of diminished expectations mean that feeling worse in the future no longer necessarily registers as a change – whether financially or affectively? Gedalof argues that while "Theresa May might claim to be inhabiting a "new centre ground" [--] this ground has already been shifted dangerously' (2017: 210), suggesting, similarly, that austerity has, at the very least, succeeded in shifting the ground of the political and discursive landscape in such a way that makes it difficult to both keep track of and oppose.

Following considerations similar to my discussion above, Bramall asks,

is there any use in positioning a politics against a scenario that people have already taken on board and internalised? Can we expect people to get worked up about something that is still evidently happening to them, but that they don't really 'feel' – they don't construe as 'having an impact'? (cited in Bramall et al. 2016: 126)

Although in this thesis the answer is a resolute yes – not only is a politics positioned against austerity necessary, but it is, of course, also already existing – at the same time this discussion points at the importance of thinking through what *kind* of a politics austerity necessitates. This thesis' focus is on sexual politics, but similarly in my case the ways in which austerity functions to limit and condition the future legibility and legitimacy of sexual and intimate lives, subjects, and expectations is seen as crucial for any such politics. Challenging the cultural logics, subjectifying effects, and

political rationalities of austerity discourse and politics are, here, positioned as central to any efforts to counter them. The *political* importance and urgency of unpacking and questioning the relationship(s) between sexuality, intimacy, and austerity are, thus, signalled by austerity's futuristic orientation – the ways in which its regulatory and discursive mechanisms seek to limit political action in the now, and to narrow political imaginaries in the future.

Framing and Methodology

As mentioned above, the central problematic that this thesis responds to is: what kinds of sexual and intimate lives, subjects, and politics are made (im)possible, (il)legible, or (il)legitimate by and within austerity politics? As should be clear by now, key to the framing of this question is, firstly, the assumption that sexuality is not an inner essence, merely biological, or only pertinent as or in relation to the identity categories of homo-, bi-, and heterosexual. Instead, sexuality is here perhaps more accurately conceptualised as *the sexual* – a dynamic field encompassing identities and subject positions, as well as acts, behaviours, norms, and power relations that intersect with each other in multiple ways. The multifaceted nature of sexuality has been a long-standing topic of enquiry within sexuality scholarship generally, as well as queer theory more specifically. However, despite many of these interventions specifically highlighting the constructed and historically contingent nature of sexual identity categories, as well as developing alternative frameworks for understanding sexuality – many of which are examined in Chapter 2 – the field of sexuality scholarship overall has tended to remain focused on identitarian forms and modes of sexuality. The first gap in sexuality literatures that this thesis intervenes in – and seeks, in part, to fill – is, thus, that between the theoretical contributions that have highlighted sexuality's many modes of operation, and the overwhelming emphasis on sexuality *as identity* within much of sexuality scholarship.

Secondly, my central question presupposes a relationship between sexuality and other economic, political, and cultural processes that can – and

do – in many ways shape sexual and intimate meanings, behaviour, acts, norms, and identities. The *boundaries* both of what kinds of sexual and intimate lives and subjects are possible and of what sexuality and intimacy are understood to mean in a particular context are, thus, shaped and influenced by that context. The embeddedness of sexuality in political, economic, and cultural processes, structures, and arrangements, has, again, been frequently examined within sexuality scholarship, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Despite the both theoretically and epistemologically groundbreaking explorations of much of this scholarship, however, many approaches examining sexuality's relationship to politics, culture, and – perhaps in particular – the economy have, nonetheless, often tended to veer towards centralising questions arising from an understanding of sexuality as an identity or subject position alone (or primarily).⁵ As a consequence of this tendency, the many *other* ways in which sexuality functions in relation to, and is shaped by, cultural, political, and economic formations, have often received less scholarly attention than the exclusion and inclusion of sexual minorities and LG(b) populations in and by those formations. The second key way in which this thesis contributes to sexuality scholarship is, thus, by enquiring after the many ways in which sexuality and intimacy are, beyond their deployments as identity, affected and shaped by the political, economic, and cultural formations of austerity – epistemologically as well as otherwise.

As well as in the ways in which the legitimacy and legibility of sexual lives and subjects are shaped by the political, economic, and cultural context in which they take place, I am also interested in how that context is, conversely, affected by the understandings and deployments of sexuality prevalent within it. Sexuality and intimacy in their multiple forms interact with many processes, structures, and formations that seemingly have very little to do with sexuality and these processes, structures, and formations are,

⁵ To an extent, the same can be said about *gender* scholarship, where the focus has often remained on the implications of political economic structures and processes for women (and men), despite many contributions pointing out that the economy is, in fact, a *gendered structure*. See Chapter 1, as well as Brah et al. (2015) and Pearson and Elson (2015) for more detail.

in turn, reinforced and contested, made and remade, in the process. The nation-state – as well as each of its constitutive parts – is a pertinent example, but so are policy framings and processes, discursive and cultural formations, and broader political economic processes such as neoliberalisation. As Chapters 1 and 2 discuss, these processes have received plenty of scholarly attention, particularly in the wake of austerity politics in the UK and that of neoliberalisation in many other contexts. Frequently though, these scholarly interventions have either conceived of sexuality as identity or subject formation alone, as above, or focused solely on the cultural sphere and particularly on media discourse as the site within which sexual regulation takes place in a context such as austerity – thus risking reproducing the common delegation of sexuality solely to the cultural, rather than the material, sphere – as I discuss centrally in Chapter 3. Thirdly, then, this thesis adds to and complements these literatures by examining the role of sexuality in multiple different discursive and regulatory sites, encompassing media and policy discourses, as well as policy implementation and statework.

Overall my interest is, thus, in tracking and exploring the non-identitarian deployments and regulation of intimacy and sexuality across a variety of discursive and regulatory sites that are significant for and within austerity politics. The selection of these discursive and regulatory sites (and my case studies more broadly) is directly informed by my research question and the central argument of this project – that sexuality and intimacy matter to austerity and, further, that they matter in ways that have nothing to do with identity positions. This project's epistemological orientation is, thus, made explicit in my desire to question and *decentre* what is most frequently known and named as sexuality and, conversely, to *recentre* those aspects of sexuality and intimacy that rarely are – an approach delineated in more detail in Chapter 2. Since a key part of the rationale for this project is precisely to explore the modes and forms in which sexuality appears within austerity politics *despite not being named as such*, a predefined set of case studies was not a possible starting point here. The process by which I chose my case studies was, therefore, not a straightforward one – although that

pertaining to Chapter 3's examination of sexual regulation within policy discourse was considerably more straightforward than the others. Despite not often focusing on sexuality, policy-as-discourse analysis as a method sees relatively prolific use within critical sociology and social policy studies. My choice to begin with an analysis of policy texts is, thus, a deliberate one, as policy is perhaps the discursive and regulatory arena most comfortably associated with austerity politics.

I watched *I, Daniel Blake* in the cinema when it was first released in late 2016, just after the temporal halfway point of my thesis and only a few weeks before I was due to start writing the chapter – Chapter 4 – that the film eventually became a central part of. *I, Daniel Blake* seemed like a perfect fit with *Benefits Street* – the other key material I had already decided to examine in this chapter – and the way in which the reception of each of these two media texts largely mirrored that of the other attests to that 'fit.' These representations highlight something important about the two poles of the 'deserving/undeserving' binary, thus also illuminating my own early experiences detailed above. The cultural judgements deployed to question my mother's ability to raise a child who did well at school sometimes functioned as proof of her (and, by proxy, my) deservingness, but if those doing the questioning remained unconvinced of her abilities, they marked us as clearly undeserving instead. This 'jostling' between the two poles of the deserving/undeserving binary forms a central part of my investigation of the two media texts in Chapter 4.

Finally, Chapter 5's focus on processes of policy implementation and service delivery specifically in the context of neoliberal penalisation stemmed from a feeling I had throughout the writing of earlier chapters that something significant in relation to sexuality and intimacy was at play in what Loïc Wacquant (2012) calls the growth of the 'penal state.' From the growth of the immigration detention estate; to the intensification of the benefit sanctions regime during the austerity era; and to the aptly dubbed 'Bedroom Tax' – these processes and practices initiated and managed by the state all seemed to meddle in the intimate sphere, highlighting the extent to which the intimate sphere is often not quite *one's own* when it comes to

marginalised populations. Despite the different paths that I took to arrive at the varied research sites of this thesis, however, in all three cases the case study was chosen because it reveals something new and different about the role(s) that sexuality and intimacy play within austerity politics. This thesis' use of three different case studies and research sites – as well as methods, as I explain below – is, thus, intentional and, indeed, in some ways necessary – given my research focus and question.

The roundabout ways in which I came across and selected my three case studies are a direct consequence of what I see the case studies as illuminating – as are the methods that I use in my analysis of them. Similarly to the case studies themselves, then, a predefined methodology and methods was not a suitable starting point for this project. Instead, the methods employed on the subsequent pages of this thesis follow from my choice of case studies and research sites, and as a result of this indirect process the methods used in each chapter are different. Although Chapters 3, 4, and 5 all deal with discursive and regulatory processes, they do so in somewhat different ways. Chapter 3 employs policy-as-discourse analysis to examine sexuality's deployments and regulation within policy texts; whereas Chapter 4 uses (and develops) a figurative methodology to examine the role that sexualisation plays in the construction and circulation of certain common austerity figures, such as the 'benefit scrounger.' Although my focus in Chapter 5 is also on policy, instead of policy texts I use UK Supreme Court judgements as the core materials. Rather than as texts *per se*, however, the judgements are approached as *sources of evidence* in regards to processes of policy implementation and service delivery, in the context of what are often considered examples of punitive or penalising welfare and housing policies. Overall, then, my research question – enquiring after the (im)possibility, (il)legibility, and (il)legitimacy of sexual and intimate lives, subjects, and politics within austerity – has led me to an explorative methodological approach, where the methods I use follow the case studies – which themselves, in turn, follow the research question.

Why Sexual Politics?

The final question (or set of questions) I want to sketch out in this introduction is that related to sexual politics. Why centre my intervention on *sexual* politics, rather than, say, anti-austerity or anti-neoliberal politics? And why, indeed, centre *politics* at all? As suggested above, the question of sexual politics arises partially from my own early experiences and particularly from my felt frustration about the lack of recognisable or legitimate avenues for political action and subjectivity in the context of the sexual regulation I both witnessed and experienced as a child. This project has, thus, from its inception been motivated by a desire to *challenge*, as well as to examine, some of the non-identitarian ways in which sexuality continues to be sutured to the discursive and regulatory operation of political economic formations such as austerity. My central argument throughout this thesis is that austerity politics functions to shape – and usually limit and constrain – the legibility and legitimacy of sexual and intimate lives and subjects. Part of this function is austerity’s futurity and, more specifically, its orientation towards a future in which the possible modes and imaginaries for sexual and intimate lives and subjects are narrower and more constrained. I am, thus, driven to explore what I, following Berlant (2011), call *the political*, by my desire to find ways to challenge and refuse austerity’s futurity and the limitations and constraints it potentially induces in relation to sexuality and intimacy – despite Berlant’s acute reminder that ‘an intimate attachment to the political can [itself] amount to a relation of cruel optimism’ (*ibid.*: 227).

2013 saw what is considered by many as the most defining victory of a kind of sexual politics in recent times in the UK: the passing of the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act*, which legalised same-sex marriage in England and Wales. The passing of the act by the Coalition Government registered as a surprise in many quarters, especially as it was broadly presented as the result of David Cameron’s – the then Prime Minister – personal conviction, and for many it signalled a new, more socially liberal, Conservatism, as Richard Hayton and Libby McEnhill (2015) discuss. The positioning of this moment as a pinnacle of sexual liberation, or, indeed, as a

different kind of Conservatism, drew many criticisms, however. For some, Cameron's success in modernising and liberalising the Conservative party turned out to be rather limited despite this legislative victory (*ibid.*; Atkinson et al. 2012), and for others, the act – and others like it – has the potential to open the door to the processes of normalisation, regulation, and exclusion that tend to accompany state recognition of, and the granting of formal rights to, any particular subset of the population. Same-sex marriage, the kind of normative sexual politics that it exemplifies, and the racialised and sexualised exclusions that tend to accompany such a politics, have most often been critiqued from the perspectives of homonormativity (Brown 2012; Duggan 2003; Puar 2007, 2013) and sexual citizenship (Brandzel 2005; Josephson 2005; Payne and Davies 2012; Stychin 2000, 2001; Taylor 2011) – approaches examined in more detail in Chapter 2.⁶

Although I broadly align myself with many of these critiques, rather than in critiquing the Marriage Act *per se* my interest in this thesis is in questioning and decentring the understandings of sexual politics that such political claims and interventions flow from.⁷ What I would characterise as a colonising of the field of sexual politics by identitarian understandings of progress and politics tends to be underpinned by a notion of certainty – that it is possible to know in advance who the subjects of sexual politics are, what issues are relevant for sexual politics, and who or what the appropriate targets of political action are. It also signals a degree of belief that these factors will remain temporally constant and, consequently, a conviction that political moments such as the passing of the same-sex marriage act constitute a kind of an end point in sexual politics – thus reproducing a teleological notion of sexual liberation and progress. It also, finally, performs an exclusion of the many other ways in which the discursive and regulatory frameworks that seek to limit and manage sexual and intimate lives can be challenged, appropriated, ignored, and refused –

⁶ See also Bassichis and Spade (2014) and Burns (2012) on the connections between LG(b) rights or sexual citizenship claims and racism, specifically; and Lamble (2014) on the claims to punitiveness that can attach to gay rights.

⁷ However, at the same time I recognise the importance of marriage rights for the survival of many LG(b) subjects and for the liveability of many LG(b) lives.

like my mother both did and taught me to do throughout my childhood. As my own experiences, thus, indicate, I am drawn to the political by my conviction that such things *cannot* be known in advance, especially as sexuality's deployments in the discursive and regulatory functioning of political, economic, and cultural formations change and shift all the time. In this thesis I, thus, explore the question of what kind of political engagements, subjectivities, and action might follow from centring non-identitarian understandings of sexuality – without determining the end goals of such a politics in advance.

Finally, the suturing of sexuality to identity and rights-based political claims often rests on, and reproduces, the split between the material and cultural spheres – a split that I challenge in more detail in Chapter 3. The frequent framing of many of the issues I raise throughout this thesis as 'merely cultural' – to use Judith Butler's (1997) phrase⁸ – constitutes an *a priori* dismissal, whereas here the material and cultural are considered inseparable. Similarly, the material differences in my and my friends' living conditions during my childhood were intimately linked to, and inseparable from, the various cultural judgements and assumptions that my family was subject to. In the first instance, then, a sexual politics in a time of austerity would be cognisant of and invested in interrogating both materiality and the cultural politics that attach to such materiality. The framing of forms of sexuality through the notion of labour has a long history in feminist politics (Carby 1982; Fraser 1996; Hennessy 2000, 2014; Millett 1970), and my analysis of sexuality's deployment in austerity discourse in Chapter 3 is indebted to this history. At the same time, Chapter 3's examination of austerity discourse's deployments of sexualised assumptions and judgements illustrates that such judgements are never entirely separate, or separable, from material concerns.

A sexual politics that stems from non-identitarian understandings of sexuality would also be cognisant of sexuality's co-constitution with race, class, ability, age, and other forms of difference, as well as, crucially, of the

⁸ Butler uses this phrase in her well-known debate with Fraser (1997), which I examine in more detail in Chapter 3.

varied ways in which these differences materialise and are deployed in relation to cultural, political, and economic formations – as both my own experiences (and myopias) discussed above and the examination of sexual subjectivities in Chapter 4 illustrate. In addition, such a sexual politics would be invested in materiality in another sense, in that it would recognise the material requirements necessary for an intimate and sexual life – access to space, time, and proximity – as I explore in more detail in Chapter 5. Finally, as Chapter 5 also suggests, such a sexual politics would be aware of the trap of deploying a narrow notion of liberation reliant on the state as the granter and guarantor of rights, but at the same time not refuse or let go of the state entirely. This brief sketch of sexual politics is not meant as a prescriptive or comprehensive set of demands, but instead as a set of basic conditions that I see as the *necessary conditions* for any non-identitarian conception of sexual politics – in line with this thesis’ overall commitment to opening the door to, and exploring the potential for, such a sexual politics, rather than deciding in advance what it would look like.

Structure of Thesis

The following two chapters provide the contextual, theoretical, and epistemological frameworks for the rest of this thesis, including an examination of existing literatures both around austerity and around sexuality’s relationships with various cultural, political, and economic formations. Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of austerity’s discursive and policy deployments, and subsequent dominance, in the political field in response to the 2007-8 financial crisis, conceptualising austerity as a policy formation, on the one hand, and as a discursive formation that functions to reproduce the austerity moment as one of exceptional crisis, on the other. Secondly, I challenge this positioning of both the crisis and austerity as exceptional and argue, instead, that they both originate in the same set of cultural logics, political rationalities, and economic reasonings. Framed in this way, the crisis itself appears as a *symptom* of the much longer-term processes of neoliberalisation and deepening inequality, and austerity, in turn, as an *opportunity* to escalate or intensify these processes. The third

and fourth sections investigate and theorise the Coalition Government's 'crisis response' – framed largely through austerity discourse and politics – situating it as part of this longer history of neoliberalisation. The first of these sections examines the response from the point of view of work and welfare and the second from that of the state – with gender providing the analytical lens for the discussion in both. In focusing on austerity's discursive deployments and, in particular, on the much-researched *gendered* implications and underpinnings of those deployments – where sexuality is mostly absent – this chapter also anticipates the following chapter's discussion of the key theoretical and epistemological approaches to sexuality and intimacy that the rest of this thesis' chapters both employ and move forward in their analysis.

While the various *effects* and *impacts* of austerity politics – as well as those of other, related processes such as neoliberalisation and precarisation – on women, sexual minorities, and other minority populations have been relatively well documented and analysed, as Chapter 1 highlights, scholarly work has less often focused on the *discursive and regulatory deployments* of sexuality within the neoliberalising politics of austerity in the UK, as this chapter has pointed out – although there are, of course, many exceptions. Indeed, this thesis centrally argues that it is precisely as a result of the (both scholarly and broader) tendency to overwhelmingly focus on sexuality as a set of *predefined* identity categories and subject positions that much gets missed about the interrelatedness of sexuality and intimacy to austerity politics – as well as to the state, neoliberalisation, class, and so on. Chapter 2 focuses on the key theoretical and epistemological approaches to sexuality, intimacy, and the regulation of both that underpin this thesis' analysis, beginning with a brief section exploring the (broad) questions of what sexuality is; how it is conceived of in this thesis; and what it means, in theoretical terms, to engage in an analysis of sexuality and intimacy outside of identity formations. The following three sections each focus on a particular way of conceptualising sexuality and intimacy – as sexual subjectivity, sexual inequality, and intimate disruptions – foregrounding the subsequent chapters' employments of these different conceptualisations.

As this introduction has briefly discussed, my methodological approach in this thesis is explorative and the methods employed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, consequently, different from one another. Thus, Chapter 2, as well as providing a *theoretical* grounding for this thesis, also introduces the specific methods used in the subsequent chapters. Since each method follows from my choice of a particular research site and the conceptualisation of sexuality deployed in relation to it, the methods are introduced and discussed in relation to each particular conceptualisation of sexuality: the section on sexual subjectivity discusses the figurative methodology employed in Chapter 4; that on sexual inequality introduces policy-as-discourse analysis – the method used in Chapter 3 – and the section discussing intimacy accounts for Chapter 5’s method – analysis of processes of service delivery and policy implementation. Overall, these two chapters provide, firstly, a rationale for examining the ‘sexual and intimate life’ of austerity in the context of the broader argument that austerity should be seen as part of a longer process of neoliberalisation (Chapter 1) and, secondly, an unpacking of the term ‘sexual and intimate life’ – what it means to examine sexuality’s non-identitarian deployments and regulation in relation to a cultural, political, and economic formation such as austerity (Chapter 2). Following these two chapters, Chapters 3, 4, and 5 form the analytical core of this thesis.

Chapter 3 focuses on policy discourse, and more specifically on the repeated recent attempts by both the Coalition and Conservative Governments to shift the definition of (child) poverty away from material and economic understandings and towards individual and cultural ones. I examine these recent attempts through a reading of three key policy texts and make the arguments that, firstly, these attempts indicate a significant shift towards the *culturalisation* of poverty and, secondly, this culturalisation depends on, and is underpinned by, certain discursive deployments of sexuality and gender. These deployments, in turn, place the (poor) family at the centre of poverty discourses – positioning it both as the site for the reproduction of poverty and, consequently, as the proper target of government action to interrupt said reproduction. This, in turn, highlights

familial gender dynamics, reproductive arrangements, and parenting practices as key aspects of the discursive framing of poverty within austerity politics. Sexual regulation is, thus, here located in the operation of particular sexual values and norms within policy discourses, as well as in the ways in which these discourses encourage certain sexual behaviours and familial arrangements and strongly discourage others. Towards the end of the chapter sexuality is positioned as central not only to the discursive regimes that *culturalise*, *individualise*, and *familialise* poverty – and, thus, help maintain a division between ‘hardworking taxpayers’ and a ‘benefit scrounging’ and immoral *underclass* – but also to citizenship regimes, through the discursive logics that connect regimes of sexual regulation to imaginaries of the national future. Finally, by framing sexuality through the concept of *sexual inequalities*, I argue that these connections indicate that sexuality plays a key role in the processes by which the material operation of both class and sexuality within the political economy is increasingly obscured in and by the discursive logics of austerity and neoliberalism.

Following Chapter 3’s mapping of the *dominant* discursive frameworks of austerity, Chapters 4 and 5 focus more centrally on reading both with and against the grain, thus also unpacking some of the *contradictions* evident in austerity discourses. Chapter 4 takes the sexualisation of the hybrid or composite figure of the ‘benefit scrounger/recipient’ as its primary focus and traces its figuration and re-figuration as a sexualised and racialised subjectivity across two different media sites – *Benefits Street* and *I, Daniel Blake*. While many others have examined the circulation of *specific* figures within various media sites in the context of austerity politics, as discussed above, my interest in this chapter is to delve deeper into their *circulations*, to explore the ways in which these figurations are sexually and racially saturated to such an extent that their *legibility* as subjects depends on these processes. Although I highlight both commonalities and differences in the two texts’ figuration of benefit recipients, my focus is, thus, particularly on how these figurations utilise various sexualised and racialised discursive tropes in their making of the ‘benefit recipient/scrounger’ – thus highlighting that classed judgements

depend on processes of sexualisation and racialisation, too. The conceptual tool of *figurative economies* is developed in this chapter, firstly, to suggest that these texts participate in the *same* figurative economies and, secondly, to question to what extent this means that both the stories they can tell and the ways in which they can be read by audiences in the austerity era are, ultimately, limited. Towards the end of the chapter I continue the previous chapter's discussion of the working class/'underclass' distinction, arguing that it is reproduced in the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' binary. Finally, I explore the question of whether the racialisation, sexualisation, and general cultural and criminal dysfunction associated with one half of this binary function to discursively foreclose the possibility of its appearance as a legible *political* subjectivity.

Chapter 5's analysis focuses on state processes frequently referred to as increasing *penalisation* within neoliberalising states and argues that such processes tend to materialise in the lives of affected individuals as a series of *intimate disruptions* – or disruptions to intimate lives, relations, and spaces. Utilising UK Supreme Court judgements related to three different welfare and housing policies and practices – the Bedroom Tax, officially the Removal of the Spare-Room Subsidy (RSRS); the increasing practice whereby Local Authorities (LAs) house their social housing clients outside of the LA area; and 'workfare' or 'back to work' schemes and benefit sanctions – as sources of evidence of the processes of policy implementation and service delivery, I argue that what tends to be labelled 'penalty' is in these cases less about straightforward punishment – or, indeed, about any kind of intentional action by a coherent state. Instead, these policies and practices will be shown, firstly, to entail naturalised and implicit judgements about the value of intimacy and care and about what constitutes a liveable life; and the resulting intimate disruptions in the everyday lives of the affected individuals, secondly, to emerge from, and be implicit in, the processes by which the policies and systems are implemented. Overall this chapter indicates that these policies and practices materialise as punitive *through* their disruption of the intimate sphere and, further, that these intimate disruptions constitute a significant reconfiguration of the public/private

divide – but not in the manner often assumed within neoliberalising contexts. Finally, I ask the question – where can *the political* be located within this reframed understanding of neoliberal penalisation? – examining whether any space for political action emerges in the gaps and spaces opened up by the diffuse operation of state power that neoliberalisation entails. In both Chapters 4 and 5 *refusal* provides the framework for thinking through the political in the context of austerity’s regulation of the sexual and intimate spheres.

Neoliberalism and the Gendered Politics of Austerity

Chapter 1

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The Politics of Austerity in the UK

Austerity initially – or anew, given the historical origins of the term⁹ – gained popularity in political rhetoric in the UK in the run-up to the 2010 general election. David Cameron’s speech at the Conservative Party conference in Cheltenham in April 2009 was titled *The Age of Austerity*, proposing a ‘never-been-done-before approach to the way this country is run’ in response to the debt crisis, recession, and ‘Labour’s economic incompetence’ (Cameron 2009). ‘The age of irresponsibility is giving way to the age of austerity’, Cameron declared, calling for ‘responsible politics’, ‘personal responsibility. Social responsibility. Taking power from the state and giving it to individual people and communities’ (*ibid.*). Framed largely as a response to the 2007-8 global financial crisis – which was itself conceived of as a result of the previous Labour Government’s alleged financial mismanagement and reckless spending – austerity, consequently, became a widely used term in public, media, and political discourse in early 2010, setting the tone for the election.¹⁰ While the Conservative Party’s election

⁹ Austerity was a widely used term in the UK immediately following the Second World War. For example Bramall (2013; cf. Clarke and Newman 2012) discusses the historicity of the term, highlighting how the discursive association with war carries particular consequences for the term’s contemporary usage.

¹⁰ While the Conservatives framed austerity as a response to the financial crisis, it was not the first crisis response deployed in the UK. For in-depth analyses of the different

manifesto did not explicitly name austerity, its rhetoric reproduced the tropes of reduced state spending, localism, and collective responsibility – epitomised in the Party’s election slogan ‘We’re all in this together’ (Conservative Party 2010). Key to the early popularisation of the term ‘austerity’ was, thus, its positioning as *exceptional* – an exceptional response to an exceptional set of circumstances created by poor governance, economic crisis, and a ‘broken society’ (*ibid.*; Cameron 2009).

While the public rhetoric of the Conservatives focused on cleaning up the economic mess caused by the previous Labour Government(s), the internal processes within the Conservative Party in the run up to the 2010 election also warrant a mention. With the Labour Party moving more and more towards centre ground in the 1990s and 2000s – and eventually very close to wholeheartedly embracing neoliberalisation, as Will Atkinson et al. (2012) argue – the Conservative Party found themselves unsuccessful in electorally challenging Labour. This led to the adoption of an ‘emulation strategy’, which combined neoliberal economic ideas with a rhetoric of ‘fairness’ and ‘social justice’ (Hayton and McEnhill 2015: 9; cf. Atkinson et al. 2012; Gedalof 2017). The party’s new modernised image included embracing, even if just partially, some equalities issues – most notably same-sex marriage, as discussed in the introduction; as well as accepting – to a degree – the *concept* of social justice, most evident in Iain Duncan Smith’s work (Hayton and McEnhill 2015). It, furthermore, included the development of the ‘Big Society’ agenda, as well as a dual approach to welfare provision, entailing the maintenance of the welfare state in key areas of health, education, and pensions, while reducing spending in the area of out-of-work benefits (Smith and Jones 2015). In all of these areas, however, the rhetoric of fairness and justice has been accompanied by very little in practice, leading Richard Hayton and Libby McEnhill to describe the Conservatives’ approach as ‘essentially neo-Thatcherite’ (2015: 132).¹¹

approaches to the financial crisis in the UK and elsewhere, see Clarke and Newman (2012), Grimshaw and Rubery (2012), and Pearson and Elson (2015).

¹¹ See Atkinson et al. (2012) and Skeggs (2004) on similar discursive deployments of ‘justice’ and ‘fairness’ by the Thatcher, Major, and New Labour Governments.

Not long after the Conservative Party's (partial) election win in 2010 and the subsequent formation of the Coalition Government of the Conservative and Liberal Democratic Parties, George Osborne, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, detailed the Government's initial programme of austerity measures in his 2010 Emergency Budget (HC Deb 2010: cols 166-180). Presenting the forthcoming manifold cuts and 'reforms' to social welfare and other areas of state provision, the Budget was, again, framed as an exceptional set of measures to be undertaken, to lift the country up from 'the ruins of an economy built on debt' (*ibid.*: c167). Osborne's rhetoric emphasised the state of *crisis* and *emergency* that the country's economy was in, highlighting specifically that the structural deficit was 'worse than we were told' (*ibid.*: c171) – and, consequently, necessitated a stronger response than what had been envisioned by the Party prior to the election. While the National Health Service (NHS) and international development were ring-fenced, the social welfare budget was earmarked for £11 billion of cuts by 2014-15 – more than a third of the overall cuts (*ibid.*: c174; cf. Elliot and Wintour 2010). The tone of the June budget speech was, thus, considerably more negative than the earlier deployments of austerity rhetoric, with *Guardian* commentators Larry Elliott and Patrick Wintour summarising the budget as 'pain now, more pain later' (2010).

While these early uses of austerity rhetoric by Conservative politicians focused on the exceptionality of both the measures themselves and the situation they were intended to respond to, 2013 saw a significant shift in austerity's discursive deployments in the political field. In a speech delivered at the Lord Mayor's Banquet in November 2013, Cameron argued that the past three years showed that it is possible 'to do more with less' and signalled the Conservative Party's intention to build 'a leaner, more efficient state [--]. Not just now, but permanently' (2013). This discursive shift from austerity as an exceptional state to a rhetoric of permanent austerity did not come as a surprise to the many commentators and scholars who had all the while argued that austerity measures were, first and foremost, put forward and implemented for ideological reasons, rather than out of necessity. Cameron's 2013 speech – in contradiction to his earlier insistence that he

‘didn’t come into politics to make cuts’ (2010b) – thus, also somewhat corresponds to the argument made by many critics of austerity (Adkins 2015; Bramall 2016; Clarke and Newman 2012; Dow 2015; Evans 2013, 2015; Gedalof 2017; Griffin 2015; Tyler 2013; Wiggan 2012) – and as I argue centrally below – that austerity should be seen both as an ideological programme and as part of a longer process of *neoliberalisation*.

As I indicated in the Introduction, in this thesis the ‘politics of austerity’ refers both to the austerity *policies* themselves and the *political discourses* and *cultural mechanisms* used to justify and legitimate them. Welfare policies implemented by the Coalition and Conservative Governments since 2010 include the various changes introduced in the *Welfare Reform Act 2012*, including the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) – replacing seven separate means-tested benefits and tax credits¹²; the Benefit Cap – capping the overall benefits any one household can receive at £26,000 per annum¹³; and the Under-Occupancy Penalty – aiming to force public sector tenants with bedrooms that are deemed ‘spare’ to move to more suitably sized properties, or face a reduction in their housing benefit.¹⁴ Personal Independence Payment (PIP) was introduced to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA), obligating claimants to undergo a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to prove their eligibility.¹⁵ Various further changes and

¹² There have been significant problems throughout the pilot programme and early rollout of Universal Credit, leading to its full implementation being postponed a number of times. In the current timetable it is due to be implemented in full in 2022.

¹³ In practice the policy has mostly penalised families with multiple children, as the cap applies regardless of the number of children in the household. The policy also disproportionately affects ethnic minority populations, with 40 per cent of affected households containing someone who is from an ethnic minority (Sandhu and Stevenson 2015: 173).

¹⁴ The permitted allowance per household is one bedroom for each adult couple, each other person over 16 years of age, two children of the same sex under 16, two children under 10 regardless of their sex, a disabled child who cannot share a bedroom due to their disability, and any other child. Exemptions to the policy include foster carers, adult children who are in the Armed Forces, as well as some people with disabilities who require overnight care (Disability Rights UK 2015; DWP 2012a). The Bedroom Tax regulations form a central part of my analysis in Chapter 5.

¹⁵ These assessments were previously carried out by Atos Healthcare, but the contract was taken over by the US firm Maximus in 2015. The assessments have been widely discussed in the media and frequently criticised for both their accuracy and their quality. In numerous cases people with terminal illnesses have been declared fit for work, and therefore ineligible for disability benefits, and thousands of people have died within weeks of being assessed (Butler 2015; DWP 2012b). The deaths associated with sanctioning and ‘fit for work’ outcomes have been compiled in the online Calum’s List (2018).

cuts to welfare provision have been announced since, including cuts to Tax Credits; a further reduction to the Benefit Cap – to £23,000 in London and £20,000 in the rest of the country; and changes to eligibility for Housing Benefit – as well as the 2010 changes to Local Housing Allowance rates.¹⁶ The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) (CPAG 2013) estimated in 2013 that overall the Government would be spending £16.5 billion less on social security and tax credits in 2013-14 when compared to 2010-11, with the majority of the cuts impacting low-income families.

Various workfare schemes, requiring individuals to undertake some form of work or training in return for their benefits – most notably Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and Universal Credit – were established by the Coalition Government.¹⁷ Up to 14 different schemes have been in operation since 2010.¹⁸ Both the workfare schemes and the work and training placements themselves are provided by a mixture of public, private, and charity organisations, perhaps highlighting the deepening integration of the private sector into public sector provision, as I discuss in more detail below. The Coalition Government also extended the benefit sanctions regime initiated by Labour. Sanctions are imposed on claimants who, for example, fail to attend an interview at the Jobcentre, or in any other way violate their 'Claimant Commitments' (Gov.UK 2016b, 2018b), and result in the removal of welfare support for a period of time between four and 156 weeks. In addition to the welfare cuts themselves, a significant degree of *conditionality* has, thus, been introduced into the UK's social welfare system. Loïc Wacquant (2012) examines workfare programmes and conditional welfare as examples of increasingly *disciplinary* social policy and argues that this constitutes a significant shift away from *protective* welfare, which tended to be granted

¹⁶ Previously LHA rates – the maximum amount of housing benefit paid in different areas – were based on the median average of a sample of rents in a local area. In 2010 this changed to the 30th percentile on rental prices in a local area instead. See Wilson et al. (2016) for more information on the various changes to Housing Benefit since 2016, and Chapter 5 for a discussion of some of the implications of these changes.

¹⁷ Although the Coalition significantly expanded workfare provision, various forms of workfare had already been in use throughout the Major and New Labour Governments.

¹⁸ Two of the biggest workfare programmes – Mandatory Work Activity (MWA) and Community Work Placements (CWP) were scrapped in 2015, but other programmes are still active (Boycott Workfare 2018a).

categorically, as a matter of right. Disciplinary social policy tends to entail specific behavioural mandates, and the Conservative-led Governments and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have, indeed, openly stated that many of their welfare reforms aim to bring about behavioural change (SSAC 2014).

Apart from the welfare cuts and 'reforms' themselves, the Coalition Government also took a strong stance on fraud and error in benefit claims, introducing stronger penalties and sanctions for claimants who commit benefit fraud. The DWP regularly publishes data on benefit fraud and take-up rates (Roosma et al. 2015), and it has also actively sought the public's help in identifying benefit fraud, operating a National Benefit Fraud Hotline and an online reporting form, as well as running poster campaigns on the topic. Many activist groups and commentators have drawn attention to the significant differences in how benefit fraud and corporate tax avoidance are dealt with and discussed in the media and by politicians, however, suggesting that the former is a 'drop in the ocean compared to' the latter (Ball 2013). Ragnar Lundström argues, relatedly, that political attempts to highlight the issue of benefit fraud should be understood,

not as attempts to combat fraud, but rather as attempts to delegitimize the more general aim and purpose of the welfare state. [--] They challenge the deservingness of welfare recipients in general, not just the ones that cheat, and thereby they also transform the conditions for public trust in the welfare state. (2013: 643)

The increased and intensified focus on benefit fraud can, thus, also be examined as part of an overall discursive emphasis on delegitimising and discrediting the welfare state.

In addition to the above cuts and changes to social welfare provision, many other policies implemented since 2010 have also aimed at reducing public spending. These include, for example, various significant cuts to Local Authority funding and services (Lonergan 2015; Morse 2014; Rubery and Rafferty 2014); changes to the funding structure of the NHS (Rubery and Rafferty 2014); cuts to legal aid (Sandhu and Stephenson 2015); certain changes to immigration laws and regulations (Gedalof 2017; Lonergan

2015; Sirriyeh 2015); and the proposed academisation of all schools in England (although abandoned in the end).¹⁹ There have also been significant shifts from public to private (or to a combination of public and private) provision in various areas of state services, as Martin Smith and Rhonda Jones (2015) discuss. Privatisation has been a growing trend for instance in the prison estate, with 14 prisons currently run by private corporations, holding approximately 17 per cent of the prison population (Grimwood 2014); and in the detention estate, with all but four detention centres – officially called ‘Immigration Removal Centres’ (IRCs) – and other short-term holding facilities run by private corporations (Silverman and Hajela 2015). In addition, many other services that are part of the penal capacities of the state, such as the transportation of prisoners and detainees, are provided by the private sector.²⁰ ‘Payment by results’ contracts, ‘service commissioning’, and partial privatisation are also increasing trends in various other areas of state provision, such as workfare (Friedli and Stearn 2015) and the women’s sector, including domestic violence refuges (Vacchelli et al. 2015).

The Coalition and Conservative Governments have to date refused to publish any data they hold on the *cumulative* impact of their programme of welfare and public spending cuts and reforms, referring to modelling difficulties (SSAC 2014). Therefore, until the 2017 interim report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (Portes and Reed 2017) on the impact of tax and welfare reform between 2010 and 2017 in the UK, generally available data mostly pertained to the impact of individual policies. The EHRC report, however, confirms what many (Beatty and Fothergill 2013; Fawcett Society 2012; Hall et al. 2017; Pearson and Elson 2015; Sandhu and Stephenson 2015; Women’s Budget Group 2010) have

¹⁹ Academies are schools that receive their funding from the central government rather than local councils, and they are overseen by charitable bodies called ‘academy trusts.’ The scheme was started by Labour with the specific purpose of improving poorly performing schools but significantly expanded by the Coalition. In 2016 the Government invited all state-run schools to become academies by 2022, but this plan was dropped later in the year. It has been suggested that academisation indicates a creeping privatisation of the state education sector in the UK. See Mansell (2017) and Roberts (2017) for more information.

²⁰ For a more in-depth discussion of the trend towards privatisation within the detention estate, see Tyler (2013).

argued – that the impacts of austerity, and particularly of welfare ‘reform’, have tended to fall disproportionately on the poorest and most disadvantaged in society, with women, black and ethnic minority populations, people with disabilities, and lone parents among the biggest losers. The EHRC report details that black households lose more than double that of white households; women lose more than men at every income level; and lone parents on average lose around 15 per cent of their net income – in contrast to losses between zero and eight per cent in other family groups (Portes and Reed 2017: 3-4). Further, households that include an adult with disabilities in them lose about £2,500 per year and those also including a child with disabilities about £5,500 per year – compared to about £1,000 for families where no one has disabilities (*ibid.*: 4). Finally, the overall impact of the cuts and reforms is regressive: ‘in cash terms, those in the bottom half of income distribution, lose more than those in the top 10 per cent’ (*ibid.*: 3).

Additionally, a 2013 report by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research suggests that the impact of the cuts and reforms varies greatly across the country: ‘the worst-hit local authority areas lose around four times as much, per adult of working age, as the authorities least affected by the reform’ (Beatty and Fothergill 2013: 3). The most affected areas include Britain’s old industrial areas, some seaside towns, and certain London boroughs, while much of the south and east of England outside of London escapes relatively lightly. In short, the more deprived the Local Authority is to start with, the greater the financial hit they experience – meaning that a key effect of austerity has been to widen the gaps between the most and least prosperous local economies in the UK.

Overall, then, the various cuts and reforms associated with austerity have tended to exacerbate inequality and poverty in the UK. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (2017: 3) highlights the changes in the level of poverty in the UK overall: 24 per cent 20 years ago, 20 per cent in 2004, and 22 per cent in 2015-16. These (perhaps insignificant) trends mask significant shifts in the poverty rates of different groups, however. While very little change has taken place in the poverty experienced by working-age households without children, the last twenty years have seen

considerable reductions in poverty among pensioners and some families with children – as well as a set of specific targets introduced by Labour, aiming to eradicate child poverty in the UK by 2020. These reductions have now started to reverse, however – mostly due to the austerity-related decreases in support offered through the welfare system, as well as, perhaps, the Coalition and Conservative Governments’ de-emphasis on child poverty reduction, as my discussion in Chapter 3 indicates.

The *policy* impacts and implications of austerity have, thus, been significant and by now also increasingly well researched. While in this thesis my focus is primarily on austerity as a *political and cultural formation*, as discussed in the introduction, the policy shifts and changes detailed above form an important backdrop for my analysis throughout – as well as providing the source materials for Chapters 3 and 5. In the rest of this chapter I provide more theoretical context for the above discussion. The next section discusses the 2007-8 financial crisis and argues that – rather than as an exceptional moment – it should be seen as a *symptom* of a broader set of neoliberalising processes. The following two sections examine the Coalition Government’s ‘crisis response’ – framed largely through austerity discourse and politics – to argue that it originates and draws upon the same set of cultural logics, political rationalities, and economic reasonings that led to the crisis in the first place, thus situating austerity within a longer history of neoliberalisation. The first of these sections investigates the response from the point of view of work and welfare and the second from that of the state – and in both sections gender provides an analytical lens for the discussion.

Finally, in the brief concluding section my focus is on the role of sexuality – or rather, the absence of it – in much of the scholarship on both the crisis and austerity. As this chapter’s discussion overall highlights, gender – or, perhaps more accurately, *gendering* – has provided an important vantage point from which many have examined and critiqued not just the various cuts and changes to state provision since 2010, but also the discursive framings of ‘exceptionality’ that have helped justify and legitimate said cuts and changes. However, more often than not, sexuality

has *not* featured centrally in critical, gendered analyses of austerity, or of neoliberalisation more generally. In the final section I argue that – rather than signalling that sexuality simply does not matter to the political economy – these omissions highlight something important about the ways in which sexuality tends to operate within the discursive economies of austerity and neoliberalism. Thus, this section also anticipates the next chapter’s discussion of the key theoretical and epistemological approaches to sexuality and sexual regulation that the rest of this thesis’ chapters both employ and move forward in their analysis.

A Crisis – or More of the same?

As the above discussion has highlighted, a central feature of austerity discourse has been its framing as a crisis-led, extraordinary response to the extraordinary – or, more specifically, extraordinarily *bad* – circumstances of recession, proliferating public debt, and cultures of irresponsibility, both within government and households. This framing has been contested by many, as both heterodox and feminist economists and other social scientists have, firstly, sought to illustrate that the origins of the crisis lie, at least partially, within the policies and politics of previous Governments in the run-up to it. Secondly, many of these scholars have also argued that austerity thus conceived should be seen as part of a longer process aiming at the neoliberalisation of the state – as Cameron’s comments at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet, quoted above, arguably suggest. These approaches challenge not only the discursive framing of austerity as exceptional, but also that of the economic crisis of 2007-8, thus indicating certain continuities between the austerity politics of the post-2010 Coalition and Conservative Governments, on the one hand, and both the Conservative and New Labour years preceding it, on the other. In this section I examine some of these alternative approaches to analysing the crisis, arguing centrally that the subjectifying effects, political rationalities, and cultural logics of neoliberalisation are key to understanding both the crisis itself and the deployment of austerity discourse and politics as a response to it.

Gender was, perhaps surprisingly, a central feature of many mainstream accounts and analyses of the financial crisis of 2007-8. The risk-taking, reckless masculinities of the banking world were partially blamed for causing the crisis, while women were heralded as a potential solution to these damaging cultures of masculinity. For instance, a 2012 article in *The Independent* on Iceland's recovery from the crisis argues that this 'country ruined by testosterone-crazed bankers' was now 'back on its feet. Why? Because women took over' (Carlin 2012). Cynthia Enloe argues, similarly, that the kind of masculinity valued and rewarded by the banking world 'exuded competitiveness, [--] was capable of quick and agile decision making, [--] tolerated endless pressure, [and] courted high risk' (2013: 65). She quotes statistics indicating that the more women there were in a company's management, the less its share price fell in 2008 (*ibid.*: 69), consequently suggesting the feminisation of corporate management as a potential strategy of protection against the crisis. As Ruth Pearson and Diane Elson point out, these kinds of accounts tend to view the dominance of men in decision-making roles within private sector financial institutions and the prevalence of 'macho norms of behaviour' (2015: 11) as two sides of the same coin, leading to the claim that increasing the number of women in key positions within the sector would help both mitigate against its most harmful effects and prevent further financial crises.

These kinds of arguments, however, rely on rather essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity – with the latter supposedly more closely aligned with the neoliberal view of the human as rational and entrepreneurial – or the 'homo economicus' (Brown 2003: 25; Tadiar 2013: 20).²¹ They, further, by emphasising ontology – albeit a gendered ontology: men just *are* more competitive, risk-taking, and so on – ignore the normative and prescriptive nature of neoliberalism. Here I am pointing at the *subjectifying* effects of neoliberalism – the argument made by many that a

²¹ See Prügl (2012) for another take on this critique, suggesting that the focus on essentialised notions of gender functions to depoliticise the origins of the financial crisis. See also Nelson (2015) for a review of various studies on the risk-averseness of men and women, concluding that men and women tend to be much more similar in their responses to risk than popular understandings suggest.

central feature of neoliberalism is that it *prescribes* citizen-subject conduct. For Wendy Brown, for instance, neoliberalism is a ‘mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social’ (2003: 2), and for Isabell Lorey, similarly, modern neoliberal governmentality is ‘an art of governing people, not things or territories’ (2015: 3).²² Both Brown’s and Lorey’s (cf. Ong 2007) theorisations of neoliberalism as *governmentality* respond, in part, to what they view as overly economistic accounts of neoliberalism. For example, David Harvey argues that neoliberalisation ‘was from the very beginning a project to *achieve the restoration of class power*’ (2005: 16, emphasis in the original), and Pierre Bourdieu that it is a ‘modern repackaging of the oldest ideas of the oldest capitalists’ (1998: 34). Thus, while for Harvey and Bourdieu neoliberalism is not entirely dissimilar to classical Liberalism, proponents of the governmentality approach tend to emphasise the *subjectifying effects* and *cultural logics* as that which separates *neoliberalism* from Liberalism.

The proposition that more women in charge could have prevented the crisis not only assumes that women are somehow immune to the subjectifying effects of neoliberalism, however, but it also fails to address ‘the underlying problem of what some have called the “financialisation of everyday activities”, in countries like the USA and the UK’ (Pearson and Elson 2015: 11).²³ The ‘financialisation of everyday activities’ Pearson and Elson refer to provides another way of reading the origins of the crisis – in the effects of neoliberalisation in and on the *everyday*, rather than solely in the behaviour of financial sector actors. These effects include the way in which ‘the ability to maintain even barely adequate levels of consumption has come to depend in many well-off countries on increases in household debt’ (*ibid.*: 11) – and, indeed, nine million people in the UK were in debt in 2013, and two thirds of them were women. These processes, further,

²² Feminist scholars have developed the argument about neoliberalism’s subjectifying effects to highlight that young women, in particular, tend to be increasingly *both* positioned as ideal neoliberal subjects *and* subject to intensifying regimes of regulation and governmentality (McRobbie 2009; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008).

²³ On the financialisation of everyday activities, see also Adkins (2015) and Griffin (2015).

significantly intensified both in the run up to the crisis and as the recession unfolded, with ‘pay day’ lending – with its extremely high interest rates – growing particularly quickly. That the origins of the crisis lie partially in practices such as high-interest lending, thus, seems to confirm Harvey’s argument that ‘neoliberalization has meant, in short, the financialization of everything’ (2005: 33). Additionally, however, it indicates something important about the cultural dynamics in play, necessitating that the question of *why* debt-based spending was able to grow so rapidly is also explored.

Robin Dunford and Diane Perrons argue that the increases in debt-based spending, as well as, for example, growing aspirations to home ownership, mean that people are increasingly dependent on the ‘value-generating activities of the rich’, such that they have a stake in precisely the activities that foster rising inequalities, as well as in the ‘neoliberal system’ more broadly (2014: 477). Here Dunford and Perrons are pointing at the *cultural logics* and *attachments* that enabled inequalities to grow rapidly in the decades preceding the crisis, perhaps confirming Brown’s argument that neoliberalism is ‘not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*’ (2003: 3, emphasis in the original). Neoliberalism’s permeation of the everyday, as a set of cultural values and logics – such as in the commonsensical view of both economic aspiration and consumerism as self-evident goods – thus, provides an important aspect of explanations for the origins of the crisis. It also indicates, as Henry A. Giroux argues (2004), that neoliberalism is a cultural project, or encompasses a cultural logic, as much as an economic and political one and, therefore, any struggle against neoliberalism must also address its cultural politics.²⁴

The origins of the crisis can, thus, be thought through the everyday practices, political rationalities, and cultural logics that legitimated growing inequalities in the run up to it – as well as in its aftermath, as I discuss further below – such that ‘while the economic crisis began in the USA and

²⁴ On the cultural politics of neoliberalism, see also Clarke (2004), Duggan (2003), and Tyler (2013).

the UK in the banking sector [--], the underlying cause was rising inequality' (Perrons and Plomien 2014: 298).²⁵ As Diane Perrons and Ania Plomien argue, examining 'the fundamental economic and political restructuring that took place in the decades of neoliberal globalization preceding the financial crisis, particularly that associated with rising inequalities' (2014: 299), is a necessary addition to any analysis of the role of the banking sector itself in causing the crisis. In the UK context this means considering the role of both the Conservative and New Labour Governments in creating the economic, political, *and cultural* conditions both for the crisis itself and for the putting forward of austerity as a commonsensical or self-evident response to it. The policies of these Governments are – at least partially – to blame for growing inequalities in the decades preceding the crisis and they can, therefore, be seen as a key factor behind the crisis itself.

Considering the significant continuities between the Thatcher, New Labour, and Coalition Governments, then, the – largely successful – reframing of the narrative by the Conservatives to one dominated by Labour's 'reckless' spending and their alleged role in *causing* the financial crisis is nothing short of remarkable.²⁶ ²⁷ This is especially the case since the Conservatives had, at the time of Labour's own programme of economic deregulation pushed them to go even further with it (Atkinson et al. 2012). Many commentators (Karamessini 2014; Perrons and Plomien 2014; Piketty 2014) have, further, questioned the effectiveness of austerity measures in reducing public debt and fostering economic growth and, consequently, in combatting the financial crisis at all – thus challenging the very foundations of the Coalition's approach and rhetoric.²⁸ Penny Griffin notes that, despite

²⁵ For more detailed analyses of the role of inequalities in causing the crisis, see also Bhattacharyya (2015), Karamessini (2014), Rubery and Rafferty (2014), and Stiglitz (2002).

²⁶ Although there is some evidence that the tide has now begun to turn: according to a YouGov poll (Dahlgreen 2015), in November 2015 for the first time Labour was *less* likely than the Conservative Government to be blamed for the public spending cuts, with 33 and 32 per cent of respondents blaming the Conservative Government and the last Labour Government, respectively. However, more than half of the respondents still viewed the cuts as 'necessary.'

²⁷ See also Atkinson et al. (2012), Clarke and Newman (2012), and Gedalof (2017) for further discussions of this reframing.

²⁸ See Chick et al. (2016) and Weeks (2014) for further economic analyses suggesting the same, and Clarke and Newman (2012) for a discussion of the many studies on this issue.

the fact that ‘the global financial crisis has neither ended nor is it resolved, “it” is often thought about as a specific, time-bound and singular “event”’ (2015: 56). The approaches discussed here so far indicate resolutely that this is not the case, suggesting instead that the crisis should be seen as a symptom of, rather than an exception to, the usual business of neoliberalisation – a set of processes that further continued in the form of austerity politics in the aftermath of the crisis, as I argue below.

While I focus my analysis in this thesis explicitly on the ‘austerity era’ – at the risk of reinforcing a view of post-2010 austerity as a specific, and perhaps exceptional, time period – it is important to note that I do so with full acknowledgement that austerity is part of this longer history – and, crucially, that it also has a future life past its explicit rhetorical deployments, as suggested in the introduction. As the following section argues, the ‘crisis response’ of the Coalition Government – framed centrally through austerity – should, thus, be viewed as a continuation of existing dynamics of inequality, with the crisis itself appearing as ‘an opportunity to deepen neoliberal political and economic relations’ (Bedford and Rai 2013, cited in Griffin 2015: 56). This framing of both the crisis and austerity as originating in the same set of political rationalities, cultural logics, and economic conditions also helps explain what Maria Karamessini and Jill Rubery call ‘the most ironic outcome of the crisis’ – that the ‘recipe offered to address the aftermath of the financial collapse is simply more of the same’ (2014: 337). The post-2010 austerity period can, thus, perhaps be seen as an *intensification* or an *acceleration*, but not as an *initiation*, of the – already on-going – processes of welfare retrenchment and, more generally, neoliberalisation²⁹ – although there are also important differences in some of the specific ways in which these processes have proceeded and been legitimated in the context of austerity. Overall, then, while the policy context of neoliberalising austerity politics may seem like ‘business as usual’ (Griffin 2015: 51), the subjectifying effects, cultural logics, and political rationalities

²⁹ As Bhattacharyya states: ‘the moment of the financial crisis may spark and enable the most extreme of austerity measures to be implemented, but the overall project of austerity was not formed in that moment’ (2015: 2).

of austerity do not always correspond with those of earlier periods of neoliberalisation and, therefore, warrant examination in their own right.

Neoliberalising the Crisis Response: Work and Welfare

Neoliberalisation is often thought to involve certain major shifts in the organisation of labour markets and relations, as well as in the nature of both work and welfare. These shifts are frequently characterised as a departure from Keynesianism, where welfare state entitlements have historically been tied to worker status.³⁰ The recent developments frequently examined and theorised as the increasing *flexibilisation*, *informalisation*, and *precarisation* of labour have tended to lead to an individualisation of risk – in contrast to the Keynesian welfare arrangements where risk was shared more universally. In this section I examine the Coalition Government's 'crisis response' to investigate whether such changes are occurring in austerity era UK, with various gendered analyses of the (austerity) politics of work and welfare providing the pivot around which I focus my examination. I argue, firstly, that the cultural logics, political rationalities, and economic reasonings that austerity has drawn upon are the same as those that led to the crisis in the first place. Secondly, in the case of welfare and work, these logics have included gendered assumptions about responsibilities for care and domestic work, and women's (and men's) suitability for particular kinds of work – assumptions that have, in part, enabled the installation of austerity as a commonsensical response to the crisis, as well as functioned to legitimate the growing inequalities that have both preceded and followed austerity. Despite the tendency for austerity discourse to be presented in seemingly genderless terms, therefore, the implications and impacts on gender have been manifold.

In the first year after the banking crisis its impacts in the UK were felt most strongly in the male-dominated sectors of industry and construction, with job loss higher for men than women from early 2008 to late 2009 – resulting in much talk about 'mancession' (Pearson and Elson 2015; Rubery

³⁰ See Grimshaw and Rubery (2012) for an overview of many of the changes made by the Coalition Government and an assessment of the extent to which these changes constitute significant shifts in policy around welfare and work.

and Rafferty 2014). In contrast, public sector employment in the areas of administration, education, and health – where women are more strongly represented – actually continued to grow in the same period, due to Labour’s policy of fiscal stimulus in response to the crisis (Rubery and Rafferty 2014). However, as what started as a banking crisis morphed into a sovereign debt crisis, the tide began to turn in 2010 with the Coalition Government’s shift to policies of fiscal tightening. The public and service sectors were impacted much more strongly by the second round of effects, and the burden of the recession was increasingly shifted onto women.³¹ In 2010-11, at the same time as men benefited from modest job recovery, the biggest job losses were experienced in sectors dominated by women, with women accounting for all of the increase in unemployment between 2010-12 (Pearson and Elson 2015). Public sector job losses, additionally, have a disproportionate impact on racialised and minority ethnic women, since they are even more likely to work in the public sector (*ibid.*; Sandhu and Stevenson 2015). A public sector pay freeze, in place between 2011 and 2013, further exacerbated the effects on women’s earnings (Perrons 2017). Thus, while overall young men and migrants have been particularly vulnerable in this crisis, acting as ‘buffer groups’ (Rubery 2014: 20), in the UK the most intense longer-term effects have been experienced by women.

As a consequence of the decreases in women’s employment, a number of different trends can be observed. Firstly, as well as the job losses themselves, some (mostly women’s) jobs are being transferred from the public to the private sector – where the gender pay gap is bigger and job security in general lower – for instance in the case of the NHS (Pearson and Elson 2015; Rubery and Rafferty 2014). Secondly, increases in self-employment and part-time employment for both men and women have acted as somewhat of a buffer against even higher unemployment rates (Pearson and Elson 2015) – with a very large proportion of women in the UK working part-time (Karamessini 2014). The rise in self-employment, in particular, indicates an informalisation of the labour market, with much of

³¹ Overall, an estimated 900,000 public sector jobs will be lost between 2011 and 2018 (Rubery and Rafferty 2014: 128).

self-employment resulting in a loss of the rights to benefits, pensions, and paid holidays (Pearson and Elson 2015). Deteriorating job security and working conditions are, therefore, a likely consequence – Rubery goes as far as to suggest that women may end up acting as a ‘reserve army of labour’ (2014: 31; cf. Barker and Kuiper 2014) against their own wishes and interests, as the standards at the bottom of the private sector labour market are being used as a benchmark to reduce employment standards across the board.³² These trends, thus, perhaps also confirm the argument made by many that neoliberalisation tends to be associated with increasing flexibilisation, informalisation, and precarisation in the labour market, as I explore in more detail below. More specifically, these shifts also indicate the changing composition of the working class, as Wendy Bottero (2009) argues, with the increase in precarious and insecure forms of employment matched by a corresponding decline in traditional blue-collar occupations, such as in the ‘heavy’ industries.

Bottero’s argument is reflected in the results of the Great British Class Survey (Savage et al. 2013), a 2013 study that – with the intention of updating the out-dated and simplistic separation between the working, middle, and upper classes – identified seven different classes in the UK: the elite, the established middle class, the technical middle class, the new affluent workers, the emergent service workers, the traditional working class, and the precariat – each consisting of different levels of economic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1986).³³ The precariat (15 per cent of the total number of respondents) – separated from the ‘traditional working class’ (14 per cent of the total) and the ‘emergent service workers’ (19 per cent of the total) – has the lowest concentration of all kinds of capital, as well as other kinds of social disadvantage, such as not having attended university (Savage et al. 2013). The ‘emergent service workers’ have relatively high degrees of cultural and social capital, while the

³² Bhattacharyya suggests, further, that the ‘low-wage economy’ may also be playing a role in justifying *welfare* cuts: ‘why should benefits cover “necessities” if such necessities cannot be covered by those receiving wages? In the process of battle to the bottom, the terms of what may be deemed “necessary” for a decent life are rewritten’ (2015: 162).

³³ See also Standing (2011) for a similar classificatory scheme.

‘traditional working class’, although moderately poor, are significantly better off than the other two ‘working classes’ in terms of capital³⁴ – but discussed as a sort of residue of earlier historical periods, part of an older generational class formation.³⁵ Other social disadvantages are also over-represented in these three classes: the ‘traditional working class’ has the highest proportion of women of all the classes, whereas the ‘emergent service workers’ are most likely to belong to an ethnic minority.

Bottero (2009) goes on to argue for the use of the term ‘working classes’, in order to better reflect this considerable diversity in the old category of the ‘working class.’ As the above discussion highlights, some significant shifts in class hierarchies, and particularly in the composition of the working classes, are, indeed, evident in the ‘post-crisis’ landscape, in the UK as well as elsewhere – perhaps the reason behind the recent explosion in scholarship examining the *condition* of precarity.³⁶ The most precarious populations have been discussed and theorised variously as a ‘precariat’ (Standing 2011); a ‘sub-proletariat’ (Bourdieu 2003); ‘non-subjects’ (Tadiar 2013); ‘surplus populations’ (Bhattacharyya 2015); ‘wasted humans’ (Bauman 2004); and the ‘dispossessed’ (Wacquant 2012) – perhaps also paralleling the Marxist ‘lumpenproletariat’, a term he used to describe the ‘underclass’ devoid of class consciousness.³⁷ Many feminist and other critics (Bhattacharyya 2015; Bottero 2009; Clarke 2004; Evans 2013, 2015:

³⁴ The ‘traditional working class’ has an average house value of £127,174 and average household savings of £9,500 (£17,968 and £1,138 for the ‘emergent service workers’, and £26,948 and £793 for the ‘precariat’, respectively). They are not better off than the other two ‘working classes’ in terms of income, however. Here the ‘emergent service workers’ are better off, with an average household income of £21,048, compared to £13,305 and £8,253 for the ‘traditional working class’ and the ‘precariat’, respectively (Savage et al 2013: 230).

³⁵ The ‘traditional working class’ is also on average older than the ‘precariat’ and the ‘emergent service workers’, with a mean age of 66, compared to 50 and 34, respectively (Savage et al. 2013: 231). In geographical terms, the ‘traditional working class’ tends to be concentrated in the old industrial areas outside the southeast of England, especially in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, while the ‘precariat’ is also located in the old industrial areas but often away from large urban areas. The ‘emergent service workers’, conversely, is a resolutely urban grouping, mostly based in London and university towns around the UK.

³⁶ Lorey provides a useful distinction between *precariousness* – ‘a socio-ontological dimension of lives and bodies’ (cf. Butler 2004a, 2009); *precarity* – the ‘distribution of precariousness’ according to relations of inequality; and governmental *precarisation* – a ‘mode of governing’ (2015: 11-13).

³⁷ For more detail and discussions of Marx’s term ‘lumpenproletariat’, see Chapter 10 in Hall et al. (1978), Hemmerle (2006), and Tyler (2013). ‘Underclass’ discourse also provides a key aspect of my analysis in Chapters 3 and 4.

Federici 2008; Lorey 2015), however, have pointed out that the move away from Keynesianism has been less of an obvious *shift* for the populations whose relationship to wage labour has *always* been precarious, such as women and racialised populations. Lorey, for instance, argues that – rather than being in any sense *new* – precarisation has become institutionalised in neoliberalism. For her, precarity was always already incorporated in liberal modes of governance – but tended to affect particular, marginalised populations, such as women and racialised and colonised populations – whereas the shift to neoliberal governmentality has meant the normalisation and centralisation of precarisation as a mode of governance.³⁸

Despite its rather different theoretical register, Lorey's argument seems to be reflected in many of the feminist analyses of the impacts and implications of both the crisis and responses to it. Jill Rubery and Anthony Rafferty, for example, argue that 'austerity policies are intensifying the *underlying fault lines* in the UK's high inequality economic model' (2014: 123, emphasis mine), such that existing patterns and structures of inequality are intensified in the current period of austerity, rather than it leading to an entirely new kind of precarisation. Rubery (2014) suggests, further, that both the historical development of a country's 'gender regime' and more recent trends in gender relations and policy affect the way in which recessions impact gender relations. Thus, responses to the crisis are likely to take different gendered paths in different contexts, depending on how women's labour market participation and the welfare state were structured and organised prior to the crisis. Correspondingly, while the effects of benefit cuts are falling disproportionately on women in general and minority ethnic women in particular, this trend also reflects a longer history – these groups have tended to be more reliant on benefits and state

³⁸ The increasing precarity within neoliberalising contexts has also often been discussed in relation to risk, specifically. Bourdieu (2003), for instance, argues that within neoliberalism, risk tends to be transferred to wage earners, and Dowling, similarly, suggests that capital's on-going crisis 'is off-loaded onto the everyday working environments and the people that inhabit them' (2016). On risk, see also Adkins (2015) and Tadiar (2013).

assistance since the conception of the welfare state in the UK, as well as elsewhere.³⁹

In the UK the decades preceding the crisis were characterised by greater participation in waged labour by women – following the initial organisation of post-1940s welfarism largely around a male breadwinner model (Orloff 2009; Pearson and Elson 2015) – leading some (Lewis 2001; Orloff 2009) to suggest that the UK was moving towards a ‘dual breadwinner’ model. As Pearson and Elson note, however, ‘since the financial crisis, this bargain has been constantly challenged’ (2015: 21), as the Coalition and Conservative Governments have sought to claw back some of the benefits of the UK welfare state that enabled women to participate in the labour market in greater numbers. While the dual breadwinner model is still the most dominant one in the UK, a very large proportion of women work part time (Karamessini 2014). Further, Rubery and Rafferty suggest that austerity is ‘drawing on traditional models of marriage and family to reverse support for dual earner households’, incentivising married mothers to not work, but at the same time not extending this notion to lone parents, ‘where the notion that women as well as men should aspire to paid work has been retained and reinforced’ (2014: 136-137).⁴⁰ This reflects a narrowing of the emphasis on increasing women’s employment integration, whereby ‘an expectation of paid work is not matched by a right to care’ (*ibid.*: 137). Austerity, thus, indicates both continuities and breaks with the UK’s pre-crisis gender regime, with mixed prospects in the future, as Rubery (2014) suggests: some improvements in women’s career opportunities, especially at the top of the labour market, may be combined with more women becoming ‘inactive’, while others become increasingly reliant either on state assistance or on precarious employment.

However, women’s increasing participation in the labour market prior to the crisis was not matched by a corresponding increase in men’s participation in care and domestic labour, and women worldwide continue

³⁹ On these historical trends in welfare provision, see, for example, Bhattacharyya (2015), Pearson and Elson (2015), Rubery and Rafferty (2014), and Sandhu and Stevenson (2015).

⁴⁰ On these diverging trends, see also Griffin (2015), Karamessini and Rubery (2014), and Rubery (2014).

to spend at least twice as much time as men on unpaid domestic and care work (Himmelweit and Plomien 2014).⁴¹ As many (Bhattacharyya 2015; Evans 2015; Griffin 2015; Pearson and Elson 2015) have argued, the large-scale cuts in social services and public care provision that have occurred as a result of austerity have, in part, been premised on the notion that women will continue to care, particularly in an unpaid capacity. Various measures reducing support for children, pregnancy, and childcare have been introduced, including the scaling back of subsidised childcare provision, especially in deprived areas, with social care provision also under major pressure (Rubery and Rafferty 2014). The Coalition Government explicitly intended for these ‘gaps in the social fabric’ to be ‘filled by not-for-profit organizations and volunteer labour as part of the “big society”’ (*ibid.*: 133) – examined in more detail below – but as Susan Himmelweit and Ania Plomien suggest, in instances where the demand for care increases it tends to be ‘women, more often than men, who reduce their paid employment and earnings, while men may increase theirs to compensate’ (2014: 454). While most women continue to perform a ‘second shift’ in caring and domestic labour, some of this labour has also been transferred to other women in the paid care sector, where pay and employment conditions remain low. In particular, it has tended to be migrant women who have plugged the gaps resulting from women with high earnings seeking to offload their caring responsibilities.⁴²

In both the paid and the unpaid economy, therefore, austerity has tended to exacerbate existing inequalities, its logics drawing on the implicit assumption that women – and particularly racialised, ethnic minority, and migrant women – will continue to perform the role of ‘reserve army of labour’, while at the same time filling the gaps created by diminishing public services, such as in care. This discussion also illustrates Pearson and Elson’s (2015; cf. Brah et al. 2015; Evans 2013; Gedalof 2017) argument that the issue is not just that the impacts of austerity are falling disproportionately

⁴¹ On care work in general, see also Folbre (2008), Fraser (1997), Himmelweit (2007), and Orloff (2009).

⁴² See Barker and Kuiper (2014), Himmelweit and Plomien (2014), and Lonergan (2015) for more detailed discussions of these trends.

on women, but also that the economy is a *gendered structure* – with any economic decision carrying significant gendered implications. Importantly, then, as Gargi Bhattacharyya (2015) argues – and as I explore in more detail in Chapter 3 – these developments do not *necessarily* indicate a desire or explicit governmental aim that women should prioritise their caring roles over their careers. Rather, here ‘deep-seated cultures of inequality’ are harnessed by ‘the redistributive project of austerity [--] as a route to embedding diminished standards of living’ (*ibid.*: 152). Thus, withdrawing forms of welfare state support that enabled increasing numbers of women to participate in the (paid) labour market in the decades preceding the crisis provides an avenue for *privatising* reproductive labour and, therefore, a way to diminish state support and reduce the reach of state responsibilities overall.

Perrons (2014) makes a similar argument to that of Pearson and Elson in relation to the many recent scholarly analyses focusing particularly on the *top* of income and wealth hierarchies, suggesting that attention to the gendered character of the economy would enhance examinations of growing inequalities at the top – as well as the bottom, as the discussion above highlights. As a key example, Thomas Piketty (2014) charts the rise of contemporary inequality and argues that wealth is playing an increasingly important role in economic inequality, due to the long-run tendency for wealth to grow faster than income in slow-growing economies.⁴³ Piketty’s argument reflects the findings of the Great British Class Survey (Savage et al. 2013), where the elite (six per cent of respondents) has the highest concentration of all three types of capital, as well as other kinds of social advantage – standing particularly distinct from the rest of the classes in terms of their economic capital, whether determined according to income, savings, or house value.⁴⁴

⁴³ Piketty (2014) also discusses the differences he identifies between the US and Western Europe in this regard.

⁴⁴ For instance, the elite has average household savings of £142,458, which is more than double that of the next wealthiest class, the technical middle class (£65,844); and almost 180 times that of the least wealthy class, the precariat (£793) (Savage et al. 2013: 230).

Within the elite, however, income and wealth disparities are significant. The top *one* per cent and, particularly, the widening gap between them and the rest of the population have become the topic of much research (Dorling 2015; Hecht 2017; Piketty 2014), as well as the subject of both significant political focus and attention-grabbing news headlines.⁴⁵ The Occupy movement, in particular, challenged the growing inequality symbolised by the increasing wealth of the top one per cent through their slogan ‘We are the 99%.’⁴⁶ Katharina Hecht’s research on the top one per cent of income earners illustrates that even those within the top one per cent experience what she terms ‘relative (dis)advantage: they are disadvantaged compared to others at the top while being aware of their advantage compared to the general population’ (2017: 4). Due to interactions with the top 0.1 per cent, many of the high earners in the study did not feel particularly well off, especially in comparison to those with access to high levels of wealth and thus the ability to not work – and instead for example spend more time with their children. Hecht (*ibid.*) goes on to argue that the social norms within the very rich – and especially many of their explicit desire and dedication to accumulating wealth over income – may be a key driver of (particularly wealth) inequality.

While Hecht points at the social norms of the very rich in legitimating growing inequalities, Perrons suggests that the role of wider social norms also warrants attention:

As well as highlighting the multiple ways in which inequality and austerity are gendered in their effects, a gendered analysis might have enriched Piketty’s accounts of the ways in which inequalities, and their legitimisation, depend on wider social norms and values. (2014: 669)

She suggests that gender norms are a key factor behind the increasing tolerance of elite salaries, using the example of care work to highlight the differential ways in which value is accorded to ‘women’s’ and ‘men’s’ work. The power of elite income earners to ‘set their own remuneration’ (Piketty

⁴⁵ See for example Egan (2017) – ‘Record inequality: The top 1% controls 38.6% of America’s wealth’ – and Neate (2017) – ‘Richest 1% own half the world’s wealth, study finds.’

⁴⁶ On the Occupy Movement, see Enloe (2013) and Cherniavsky (2017).

2014: 24) depends, as Perrons argues, on their 'bargaining capacity within the hierarchy and with prevailing social norms which vary over time and space and are influenced by each country's specific history' (2014: 672). That contemporary 'super managers' are predominantly white and male is no accident, therefore, but rather reflects the broader social norms of the current neoliberalising time – with their significant gendered and racialised underpinnings. Thus, while orthodox explanations for rising wage inequality tend to emphasise migration, trade, and skill-biased technological change, among other factors, it is equally important to recognise the significance of 'social norms that have become more tolerant of greater inequality' (Perrons and Plomien 2014: 299).

Despite the above changes, the gender pay gap has, in fact, been steadily narrowing in the UK. As Dunford and Perrons (2014) point out, however, this is in significant part due to men's pay falling, rather than women's pay rising. Karamessini and Rubery (2014) argue, further, that the narrowing gender pay gap is also misleading as an indicator of greater gender equality because of the tendency towards the worsening of – particularly, but not exclusively, women's – employment conditions. Altogether the developments discussed in this section indicate that the neoliberalising politics of austerity have largely functioned to reproduce gender and other inequalities, thus also highlighting the futility of 'equality policies' that do not take into account the ways in which the economy continues to be structured around the production/reproduction divide, as Perrons (2017) suggests. Equality measures and initiatives such as the prevalent notion that gender equality is 'smart economics', or for instance David Cameron's proposal of mandatory reporting on gender pay gaps within corporations, indicate the increasing incorporation 'of co-opted, governance-friendly "feminist" knowledge' into discourses of 'crisis governance' (Griffin 2015: 51). Such co-opted feminisms work to enable 'existing structures and mechanisms of gendered privilege, such as the global financial industry, to suppress calls for their overhaul and to re-

entrench their power in the global political economy' (*ibid.*: 50) – thus contributing to the very inequalities that they purport to be addressing.⁴⁷

As this section's discussion has shown, attempts to counter the developments and shifts examined here need to take into account the ways in which austerity – as well as the crisis, as argued above – is reproduced in the everyday – in the increasing reliance on and attachments to debt-based spending; in the individualisation of risk; in gendered assumptions about responsibilities for care and waged work, in cultural norms that tolerate growing inequalities, and in the co-optation of 'feminist' knowledge into neoliberal discursive frameworks. Further, given the changes and shifts in the form and role of the neoliberalising state – examined in the next section – calls for a 'return' to a Keynesian, redistributive state are also unlikely to work, as Dunford and Perrons (2014; cf. Bhattacharyya 2015) point out. Thus, as already argued in the previous section, the cultural logics, subjectifying effects, and political rationalities of neoliberalising austerity need to be challenged, along with the actual policies that have increased inequalities and pushed more and more people towards poverty since 2010 – as this thesis attempts to do, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4.

Neoliberalising the Crisis Response: The State

As well as the various shifts and changes associated with neoliberalism already discussed above – the subjectifying effects, cultural politics, flexibilisation and precarisation of labour, and growing income and wealth disparities – neoliberalisation is frequently viewed as leading to changes in the nature and role of the state. Processes of privatisation and localisation, in particular, tend to be seen as shifting power from the state to other actors, leading many to characterise neoliberalism as involving a withdrawal or 'hollowing out' of the state.⁴⁸ As in the previous section, in this section my focus is on the Coalition Government's 'crisis response', but here specifically in relation to processes of privatisation, localisation, and

⁴⁷ See also Bhattacharyya (2015), Calkin (2015), and Gedalof (2017) for further discussions of such 'co-opted feminisms.'

⁴⁸ A term used and critiqued by Clarke (2004), Jessop (2000), and Peck (2001), among others.

‘statework’ (Clarke 2004: 121). Gendered approaches are again utilised – although to a much lesser extent than above – to investigate whether such changes in the state’s role or power can be said to be occurring in austerity era UK. I argue, firstly, that these shifts – although significant – do not indicate decreasing state *power*, but rather changes in the state’s *functions* and *form*, and, secondly, that various classed and gendered discourses have been deployed to justify these changes, with the discursive emphasis on feminised notions of responsibility particularly noteworthy.

At the same time as the Coalition Government began to legislate and implement its programme of welfare and public spending cuts, it launched its ‘Big Society’ plan. As highlighted above, the idea was to encourage voluntarism and local initiatives to fill in the gaps created by reduced Local Authority funding and diminishing public services, with David Cameron explicitly framing the agenda as one of *transfer of power*: ‘it’s about liberation – the biggest, most dramatic redistribution of power from elites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street’ (2010a). This ‘power transfer’ entailed a vision where ‘the centralised bureaucracy that wastes money and undermines morale’ is replaced by charities, Local Authorities, public enterprises, and private companies to ‘unleash [--] community engagement’ (*ibid.*). As many critics have pointed out, however, the implementation of the ‘Big Society’ has lacked the funding and resources necessary for the realisation of Cameron’s vision. Instead, most of the non-state actors Cameron suggests should step up to fulfil his vision have faced significant funding reductions since 2010, with the private sector emerging as the only clear winner. While Cameron tried to reassure listeners that the Coalition was not just naively assuming ‘that if the government rolls back and does less, then miraculously society will spring up and do more’ (*ibid.*), in the eyes of many commentators this is exactly what the ‘Big Society’ agenda has consisted of.

In the first two years of the programme the voluntary sector faced ‘a major potential funding gap as a result of an estimated £3.3 billion in cuts in statutory funding’ (Civil Exchange 2012: 8), indicating that the sector’s ability to plug the service provision gaps is likely to be limited. Similarly,

Local Authority funding has been cut significantly, with average cuts of 10.4 per cent per LA between 2010 and 2012, but some of the most deprived areas facing cuts of up to 25 per cent by 2016 (Smith and Jones 2015: 240). Conversely, outsourcing, commissioning, and 'payment by results' provision have grown considerably in various areas of public service provision – prompting Civil Exchange, the think tank undertaking an audit of 'Big Society', to pointedly ask, 'is the Big Society going to be led by the private sector?' (2012: 9). For example, the proportion of NHS care purchased from private providers went up from 4.4 per cent in Labour's last year in government, to 7.6 per cent in 2015-16 (Full Fact 2017); LA outsourcing increased by 58 per cent in 2014 (Smith and Jones 2015: 240); and 90 per cent of Work Programme prime contracts were won by the private sector, with charities mostly acting as sub-contractors (Civil Exchange 2012: 9). The increasingly large and complex contracts, and 'payment by results' commissioning, especially, tend to mean that voluntary sector organisations lose out to the private sector – with its economies of scale – despite the specialised expertise and experience smaller, community and voluntary organisations may bring (*ibid.*; Vacchelli et al. 2015). Overall, the outsourcing of UK's public services has doubled to £88 billion since 2010 – making the UK the second largest outsourcing market in the world, second only to the US (Smith and Jones 2015: 240).

These developments have led many to argue that, instead of a 'Big Society', what has actually occurred is 'the loss of public provision filled by a growing private sector', which is 'deeply integrated into the public sector with private organisations taking over many functions that were previously provided by government' (*ibid.*: 226-227). These changes seem to, thus, confirm the argument made by many that neoliberalisation entails a dismantling of parts of the state – or specifically the 'left hand' of the state in Bourdieu's (1998) and Wacquant's (2012) terminology, responsible for the provision of welfare and other public services. For Bourdieu, paradoxically it is states themselves that have initiated the measures of deregulation 'that have led to their own economic disempowerment' (2003: 14). Further, however, often these processes of economic disempowerment are also

thought to entail *political* disempowerment, or the transfer of *political* power from the state to other actors and institutions, as the fundamental mission of a neoliberal state becomes to 'facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital' (Harvey 2005: 7), and its legitimacy comes to be tied to 'its ability to sustain and foster the market' (Brown 2003: 12). For these scholars, then, the neoliberal state is increasingly governed by market rationality – seemingly with very little scope for the exercise of state power outside of this rationality. Here economistic and governmentality approaches to neoliberalism seem to also somewhat converge, as the state tends to hold a reduced significance for proponents of both viewpoints.

Wacquant (2012) argues that, in ignoring the state's role, theorisations of neoliberalism – whether of the economistic or governmentality variety – tend to obscure what is new about neoliberalism. He specifically critiques scholars such as Aihwa Ong (2007), who analyse neoliberalism as a set of diffuse and decentralised techniques of governance, arguing that these kinds of definitions are too broad and thus applicable to a wide range of political regimes and rationalities – liberal as well as neoliberal – whereas economistic accounts align neoliberalism too closely with neoclassical economics. Conversely, he argues that it is the '*remaking and redeployment of the state* as the core agency that actively fabricates the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to making the fiction of markets real and consequential' (Wacquant 2012: 68, emphasis in the original), that makes neoliberalism different from classical Liberalism. Central to the remaking of the state is the growth of what Wacquant terms the 'right hand' of the state, or the *penal state* – corresponding to the decline of the social state.⁴⁹ For him, the expansion of the penal capacities of the state – exemplified in the twin neoliberal regimes of *workfare* and *prisonfare* – helps resolve some of the key dilemmas of neoliberalisation: firstly, by curbing some of the effects of increasing precarisation, particularly at the bottom of the class structure; and secondly,

⁴⁹ On increasing penalisation in neoliberalising states, see also Harcourt (2010), Jessop (2000), Lorey (2015), Peck (2003), and Wacquant (2008).

by restoring the authority of the governing elites in the face of what is often labelled 'globalisation' – increasing transnational flows of capital, money, and other goods across national borders, as well as restrictions on state action by international institutions and financial capital.

The trend towards increasing penalisation within neoliberal regimes seems somewhat borne out by the UK context. Firstly, UK's prison population has been steadily growing throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with accelerating growth since the early 1990s (Grimwood 2016). Similarly, the population held in immigration detention in the UK has significantly increased in recent decades, with more than a tenfold increase in the capacity of the detention estate since the early 1990s (Silverman and Hajela 2015; Bacon 2005). As well as the growth in prisonfare, a similar growth in workfare in the austerity era is suggested by increasing conditionality in welfare; the use of workfare programmes themselves; as well as some policies that appear to be outright punitive – such as the 'Under-Occupancy Penalty' or Bedroom Tax and the benefit sanctions regime – both of which form a key part of my analysis in Chapter 5. However, whether these shifts indicate – as Wacquant seems to suggest – that the UK state has morphed into 'an overarching, monolithic "neo-liberal penal state"' (Lacey 2010: 782) remains uncertain. Nicola Lacey argues that Wacquant's approach is overly generalised and calls, instead, for analyses that not only ask what neoliberalism *is*, but also '*how* it has emerged and what sorts of institutional structures are needed to sustain the policies, practices and arrangements which have come to be associated with neoliberalism; *when* they emerged; and *where* they hold sway' (2013: 261-262, emphases in the original).

Underpinning Wacquant's account – as well as many others – of the neoliberal state is, thus, a remarkably monolithic or singular conception of the state in general. As well as easily leading to a conflation of the state and the government, such conceptualisations tend to overlook the complex and contradictory ways in which different *parts* of the state act and operate – depending for instance on the different views that the various institutions and individuals involved in policy implementation may hold on particular

policy issues, as both Lacey (2010) and Ruth Lister (2000) point out. Further, such conceptualisations tend to assume that the boundaries of the state are *knowable* in advance. Whether for example individuals involved in street-level policy implementation or service delivery; local government actors; or, indeed, the various private corporations and voluntary sector organisations (sub)contracted to run welfare services, workfare programmes, prisons, detention centres, healthcare services, and so on, are part of the state is not as clear-cut a question as it may seem. As many others have pointed out, pinning down exactly which institutions, individuals, or practices make up the state is difficult⁵⁰ – suggesting that basing arguments about ‘diminishing state power’ entirely on state spending, for example, may be overly simplistic.

Rather than viewing neoliberalisation as leading to a straightforward *reduction* in the state’s power or capacities – and the state as, consequently, diminishing or ‘hollowing out’ in a clear-cut manner – some scholars have argued that neoliberalisation tends to mean certain significant shifts in the state’s functions and capacities instead. John Clarke (2004) argues that despite major changes in neoliberalising states, they are still intimately involved in *meta governance* – or governance of governance – and for Bob Jessop (2000), this meta governance means that neoliberal states are actively engaged in shaping and modulating the transfer of powers *across scales*. For Jamie Peck, similarly,

this multifaceted process of state restructuring and remaking involves complex changes in the *relations* between different levels/scales and branches/departments of the state apparatus, such that the relationship between the form and functions of the state is often altered in quite fundamental ways. (2001: 447, emphasis in the original)

For these scholars, then, the processes of localisation and privatisation are less about a *quantitative* transfer of power from the central state apparatus

⁵⁰ On such difficulties in relation to the state generally, see Cooper (1993, 2016a, 2017) and Mitchell (1999); in relation to the neoliberal state, specifically, see Jessop (2013), Lacey (2010), and Peck (2001). See also Canaday’s (2009) insightful analysis of the manifestation of these difficulties in the historical development of regimes of sexual regulation and citizenship in the US.

to local actors or private corporations and more about a *qualitative* change in their relationships.⁵¹ The functions of neoliberal states tend to be differently organised – rather than straightforwardly replaced by other actors or free market logics – such that neoliberalising states overall are becoming ‘*differently* powerful’ rather than less powerful (*ibid.*: 447, emphasis in the original).⁵²

Thus, while the moving ‘upwards, downwards and sideways’ (Jessop 2000: 180) of specific state powers and capacities does indeed mean that a significant proportion of the *activities* previously undertaken by state institutions has been transferred to other institutions and entities, this does not necessarily entail a reduction in the state’s *capacities* or *power*. Conversely, rather than the private corporations subcontracted to do various kinds of statework having simply taken over aspects of the state – and acquired a corresponding amount of state power – these organisations’ capacities may be modified to such an extent by the *terms* of their relationship with the state that they cannot be said to be independently powerful – as the example of ‘payment by results’ provision seems to suggest. They may, rather, be thought of as being involved in statework themselves – an argument that, however, ‘does not imply an image of the state and private organizations as a single totalized structure of power’ (1999: 84), as Timothy Mitchell points out. On the contrary, there may be significant conflicts between them – as there may also be both between and within state institutions, such as government departments.

This argument, further, extends to the economic sphere – considered by many the most clear-cut example of the state’s diminishing powers under neoliberalisation. As Bernard Harcourt (2010) argues, rather than *deregulation*, neoliberalism involves the *re-regulation* of economic activity, but masked under a façade of deregulation. Peck, similarly, highlights that

⁵¹ Relatedly, see also Featherstone et al. (2012) on what they term ‘austerity localism’ – suggesting that the discourse of localism is being deployed in the austerity context as part of a broader anti-state agenda, to build support for diminishing state provision and responsibilities.

⁵² Berlant also points out that processes of globalisation and neoliberalisation do not mean that the *nation* loses its significance – in fact, it is particularly in ‘transnational conditions that the nation becomes a more intense object of concern and struggle’ (1997: 13).

“deregulationist” states are often impelled to adopt strikingly interventionist measures in order to mobilize or manufacture “markets” where previously competitive forces were weak or absent’ (2001: 445). Thus, even in the market sphere, neoliberalisation tends to involve *more* regulation in certain areas or phases.

As well as suggesting that the state appears to be differently powerful (rather than no longer powerful), this discussion also points at the *uneven* and *incomplete* nature of neoliberalism itself. Neoliberalisation has proceeded in a – sometimes drastically – different manner in different contexts, due to differing cultural logics, institutional histories, and path dependence, and it, furthermore, continues to co-exist with other governmental, economic, political, and cultural projects and logics.⁵³ Peck (2003), for instance, points out that the movement from Keynesianism to neoliberalism has been unevenly realised both across different geographical locations and in different institutional contexts and policy areas; and Clarke identifies an ‘uneven and shifting set of accommodations – at the regional, national and local levels – between previously dominant political-cultural formations and that of neo-liberalism’ (2004: 98).⁵⁴ In this thesis I frame both austerity and the state as neoliberalising – rather than as neoliberal *per se* – in order to foreground the incompleteness and unevenness of processes of neoliberalisation, as well as to indicate the alignment of neoliberal logics with specific institutions, policies, politics, and cultural formations – such as specific parts of the state or austerity discourse. This view of both the state and neoliberalisation as uneven, complex and sometimes contradictory sets of processes and practices also, perhaps, allows for the *challenging* of the cultural logics, subjectifying effects, and political rationalities of neoliberalising austerity in a different manner than would be enabled by an already completed process of neoliberalisation and an already entirely neoliberalised state – as my discussion particularly in Chapter 5 suggests.

⁵³ On these processes more generally, as well as path dependence specifically, see, for instance, Jessop (2000), Lacey (2013), and Newman (2014).

⁵⁴ See also Gibson-Graham (1996) on these variable processes in relation to capitalism more broadly.

Rather than neoliberalisation meaning a ‘withdrawal’ or ‘hollowing out’ of the state, then, we might consider these discursive tropes an aspect of what Mitchell (1999) terms the ‘state effect.’ He argues that the state appears to exist both ‘as material force and as ideological construct’, and, further, that ‘scholarly analysis of the state is liable to reproduce [--] this imaginary coherence and misrepresent the incoherence of state practice’ (*ibid.*: 76).⁵⁵ The boundary that is imagined as a constant, immovable division between the state and the non-state – including, here, the economy, civil society, and the family, for instance – is a discursive and cultural effect of state practices, not ‘an ontological constant’ (Steinmetz 1999: 26).⁵⁶ The assumption that privatisation and localisation, for instance, mean exactly that – a clear shift of power, capacities, and functions from the public to the private and from the national to the local – is, thus, similarly a function of the discursive, cultural, and symbolic work that creates the state effect. Further, if states in general are cultural effects as well as material entities and practices, marked by their imaginaries as much as their materiality as Jyoti Puri (2014) argues, then the ways in which we imagine the neoliberal state matter a great deal – not only because of our affective attachments to the imaginaries of the state, but also because these attachments shape and condition our responses to what we imagine the state as capable of and responsible for.⁵⁷

In the austerity era, popular disenchantment with the state reflects the imaginaries of a retreating or diminishing state, a state that seems to ignore its responsibilities to its citizens. The neoliberalising state practices discussed above also create ‘a strong sense of loss: the loss of state funded institutions (voluntary organisations, advice centres, arts and cultural provision), public services (the local library, hospital, youth centres), public welfare (elder care, childcare)’ (2014: 153) and so on, as Janet Newman and

⁵⁵ See also Anderson (1991) on the *nation* as an imagined community.

⁵⁶ Cooper (2016b) and Ferguson and Gupta (2002) also suggest viewing the notion of a coherent and bounded state as a discursive and cultural effect. See also Bevir and Rhodes, who conceptualise the state ‘as a series of contingent and unstable cultural practices’ (2010: 1).

⁵⁷ See Stoler (2009) for an insightful analysis of the ways in which sentiments and affects figured in colonial statecraft.

John Clarke point out. In the context of this sense of loss, it seems no surprise that many community groups and voluntary organisations have, in fact, responded to the Coalition Government's calls for 'community engagement' and a 'Big Society', for example by volunteering to run libraries. Following the significant cuts to library funding since 2010, 500 of the UK's 3,850 libraries are now at least partially run by volunteers – up from only a handful in 2010 (Flood 2017; Public Libraries News 2017). As much as these developments seem to signal what Newman and Clarke discuss in terms of a 'search on the left for alternative imaginaries of the state' (2014: 158), illustrating that public goods can not only be retained but also brought under cooperative forms of ownership, at the same time they have also inspired worries.

The successful volunteer management of libraries – as well as of other areas of public service provision – may encourage further cuts, with cash-strapped Local Authorities possibly viewing communities unwilling to take on the running of a local library as simply not trying hard enough, or as not *really* wanting or needing a library, as Alison Flood (2017) argues. Smith and Jones (2015) point out, further, that little consideration has been given to the sustainability of voluntary provision, suggesting also that the 'Big Society' approach is underpinned by a contradictory model of human behaviour, expecting both altruism and economic rationality. Stepping in to run services previously provided by the state, therefore, carries significant – discursive as well as other – consequences. As well as possibly contributing to the view that a 'leaner state' is possible – or even desirable – in the long-term, as Cameron suggested in 2013, such initiatives can potentially aid in the fostering of an extreme form of individualism – prompting Atkinson and his colleagues to view the 'Big Society' plan as 'a giant Trojan horse for precisely the kind of individualism [Thatcher] espoused' (2012: 10). Such individualism is not only based on assumptions of lowered expectations of the state and its reciprocity, however, but it also carries significant classed and gendered implications.

Kim Allen and Yvette Taylor suggest that the 'masking of a shrinking state has been enabled through, and productive of, new positions of active

and responsibilised citizenship' (2012: 11). Importantly, these processes of responsibilisation tend to operate differently in the case of differently *classed* populations, with 'the well-off [--] set free from state interference' (Gillies 2012: 90), 'while the poor are [--] responsibilised through the removal of services and practical and economic support' (*ibid.*: 92).⁵⁸ The 'Big Society' audit, similarly, identifies a "Big Society Gap" in levels of trust, engagement and social action between the most disadvantaged and affluent' (Civil Exchange 2012: 9), arguing that these inequalities need to be addressed for the 'Big Society' to be successful. As well as classed, however, the discursive framings of the responsibilised and active citizen are also gendered. In many incarnations of the rhetoric of community engagement, responsibility, and 'Big Society', it is parents and particularly mothers who are targeted as (potential) frugal and thrifty citizens, expected to take action to boost both their household finances and the economy as a whole.⁵⁹ The discursive framings of 'thrift' as desirable and pleasurable activity, thus, depend centrally on gendered notions of responsibility and frugality.

Somewhat similarly to the discursive framings around work and welfare examined above, then, here traditionalist – and perhaps increasingly so – notions of *gendered* responsibility are centrally incorporated into austerity discourses around the state and localism. As in the above section, here the cultural logics, subjectifying effects, and political rationalities of neoliberalising austerity – with their incorporation of various gendered and classed notions – are, thus, again seen as central to any politics seeking to counter and challenge austerity. Further, though, this section's discussion points at the continued importance of the state in the political imaginaries of austerity. As Newman and Clarke argue, 'how we imagine the state, how we feel about it, will shape the kinds of politics that are possible' (2014: 153). As well as a site of neoliberalising processes and practices – albeit in highly uneven, complex, and at times contradictory ways – the state is a 'site of

⁵⁸ Gillies (2012) makes her argument specifically in relation to the responsibilisation of *parents*, using free schools as a key example of the classed nature of the neoliberalising processes of responsibilisation and individualisation.

⁵⁹ On the responsibilisation of parents, see De Benedictis (2012) and Jensen (2012); on notions of 'thrift', see Bramall (2013), Jensen (2012) and Negra and Tasker (2014).

possibility' (*ibid.*: 168).⁶⁰ Moreover, it is so precisely because of the instability and incompleteness of the state and its imaginaries, as it is the contradictions, uncertainties, and instabilities within the state that – as well as carrying the risk of increasing neoliberalisation – create 'the spaces of possibility for alternative imaginaries of the state to emerge' (*ibid.*: 160) – as I explore further in Chapter 5.

Conclusion: What about Sexuality?

This chapter has examined the discursive positioning of both the 2007-8 financial crisis and that of the Coalition Government's 'crisis response' – austerity – and challenged the common framing of both as *exceptional*. Rather, I have suggested that the crisis should be viewed as originating in the same neoliberalising economic reasonings, cultural logics, and subjectifying effects that have subsequently been drawn upon – as well as, perhaps, intensified – by austerity discourse and politics. Alongside my examination of austerity's discursive logics and cultural politics, I have, thus, situated its post-2010 deployments within a longer history of neoliberalisation. Additionally, this chapter has focused on investigating neoliberalism itself, conceived in this thesis as a set of complex, uneven, and at times contradictory processes and practices framed around an increasing discursive emphasis on free market logics – and a corresponding *decreasing* emphasis on the state and public provision – with significant consequences for work, welfare, and the state. Further, neoliberalism's cultural politics, and particularly the gendered, classed, and racialised underpinnings of these politics, have been shown to significantly impact upon the ways in which austerity has been deployed in the UK context. The rest of the thesis continues this investigation, suggesting that sexuality is a key aspect of austerity politics, providing material both for the discursive mechanisms that have been used to justify and legitimate austerity – as well as the resulting poverty and inequality – and for the regulatory mechanisms deployed within austerity politics to manage said poverty and inequality.

⁶⁰ On the state as a potential 'site of possibility', see also Cooper (1993, 2016a, 2016b, 2017).

For a thesis so fundamentally structured around, and intervening in, scholarship on sexuality, this chapter has said very little about sexuality, however. My analysis here has mostly focused on *gendering* the crisis (and austerity), with parts of the discussion also pointing at its racialising and classing implications and underpinnings. So why has sexuality not featured more centrally in this chapter? Lisa Duggan (2003) provides a key account of the role of sexuality within processes of neoliberalisation. She argues – as do many others (Bhattacharyya 2015; Bourdieu 1998; Dunford and Perrons 2014; Gedalof 2017) – that part of neoliberalism’s allure and power arises from the way in which it has tended to be presented by its proponents: as technical expertise, a commonsensical view of the world, and therefore as *separate* from politics and culture.⁶¹ This common framing of neoliberal policies and logics as neutral, managerial, or simply the best or most efficient way of running the economy, obscures both the political nature of neoliberal decision making and the cultural logics underpinning it – and thereby disguises ‘the upwardly redistributing goals of neoliberalism’ (Duggan 2003: xiv).

A central feature of these neoliberal discursive framings is the dismissal of concerns about material inequalities or poverty ‘as “class warfare”, while race, gender or sexual inequalities are dismissed as merely cultural, private, or trivial’ (*ibid.*: xiv). Importantly, however, as Duggan argues, the political economy and culture are never separated *in practice*, as neoliberalism organises ‘material and political life *in terms of* race, gender and sexuality’ (*ibid.*: 3, emphasis in the original) – as well as class. On the one hand, then, ‘identity politics’ – and the sexual, racial, and gendered concerns emanating from such politics – are branded infantile and insignificant in neoliberal discursive framings, but on the other, neoliberalism depends centrally on coded hierarchies of class, race, gender, and sexuality for its cultural and political effectiveness. The maintenance of the economy/culture (or material/cultural) distinction is, thus, a key way in which the *political* operation and logics of neoliberalism are concealed. To

⁶¹ Gibson-Graham (1996) also make a similar argument in relation to capitalism more broadly.

Duggan's argument I would add, however, that another key way in which sexuality and intimacy are dismissed from discussions of neoliberalism – and the political economy more widely – is their framing as identity alone. As I argue throughout this thesis, the overwhelming emphasis on sexuality as identity is what obscures the many roles that sexuality and intimacy play in the discursive and regulatory functioning of austerity. Thus, sexuality not only plays an important part in the discursive frameworks that have enabled inequalities to flourish in the austerity era, but its designation as an identity formation alone also operates as part of the (related) discursive frameworks that, concomitantly, work to obscure the former – an argument I make in more detail in Chapter 3.

My point here is not that the crisis and austerity do not have any impacts or implications for queer or LG(b) subjects – and, in fact, they clearly do, as Nicola Smith's (2016) study (aptly titled 'Toward a queer political economy of crisis'), for instance, shows. Rather, my point is that the lack of consideration for sexuality in most of the approaches discussed above is indicative of the broader discursive context, where sexuality is seen as an identity category or subject position alone. However, sexuality is, in fact, central to many of the above analyses, and the very discourses and cultural logics that they tend to frame through gender alone will in Chapter 3 be shown to also depend on sexuality. For example, the withdrawal of welfare state support from dual earner couples has tended to be managed through discursive framings that install reproductive and heteronormative coupledness at the centre of the notion of the ideal family; whereas the positioning of lone parents as in need of labour market activation has often been justified with reference to long-standing discursive tropes that position the lone mother as sexually promiscuous or immoral and, therefore, at some distance from said ideal. Similarly, as Chapter 4 argues, the discursive and figurative processes by which certain – poor and working-class – subjects tend to be presented as immoral 'scroungers' in need of responsabilisation in the context of austerity will also be shown to depend centrally on sexuality for their reproduction. Finally, in Chapter 5 I argue that the regulation of the intimate sphere figures importantly in many

of the processes associated with the increasing penalisation of social policy within neoliberalising states.

This thesis overall seeks to provide an analysis of the role of sexuality and intimacy within the political economy of austerity, arguing that the overwhelming – scholarly and other – tendency to view them in terms of identity alone functions not only to mask their central role in austerity politics, but also aids in the dismissal of cultural and political matters as trivial or insignificant within neoliberal discursive frameworks. The omission of sexuality from most of the approaches discussed above, thus, reveals the extent to which sexuality tends to be viewed not only as an identity category above everything else, but also, consequently, as separate, or *separatable*, from gender – as well as race, class, and so on. Without attention to sexuality's role within the discursive and regulatory functioning of austerity, however, our understandings of both austerity and sexuality itself remain limited. The next chapter examines the key theoretical and epistemological approaches to sexuality, intimacy, and the regulation of both that I both employ and develop in the rest of this thesis, and makes two central arguments – firstly, that identity is far from the *only* way in which sexuality matters to the political economy, and secondly, that sexuality is co-constituted with other categories of difference in more complex, interrelated, and interdependent ways than what tends to be assumed in much of the scholarship examining the gendered or classed implications of austerity and the crisis.

Sexuality: Subjectivity, Inequality, Intimacy

Chapter 2

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Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the post-2010 deployments of austerity discourse and politics should be viewed as part of a longer history of neoliberalisation, and further, that the subjectifying effects, cultural logics, and political rationalities of these deployments warrant specific scholarly attention. Towards the end of the chapter, I also suggested that the *lack* of consideration for sexuality in many critical gendered approaches to both austerity and the 2007-8 financial crisis reflects the broader discursive context, in which sexuality tends to be discussed primarily in terms of predefined identity categories or subject positions. As this thesis centrally argues, it is precisely as a result of the overwhelming (both scholarly and broader) tendency to view sexuality as sutured to the homosexual/heterosexual distinction that much gets missed about the roles that sexuality and intimacy play in the discursive and regulatory functioning of austerity – and in the political economy more broadly. Thus, sexuality is, in fact, much *more* central to the political economy than what tends to be assumed by the critiques that have blamed ‘identity politics’ for distracting from the ‘real’ issues of class and the economy – as my discussion of Duggan’s (2003) work in the last chapter highlighted, and as I argue in more detail in Chapter 3. This chapter follows from the previous chapter’s

discussion and examines the key theoretical and epistemological approaches to sexuality and intimacy that are employed and developed in the rest of this thesis.

Notwithstanding the importance of studying austerity's gendered implications, or its effects on women or sexual minorities, in this thesis I take a rather different tack and focus instead on the – more broadly conceptualised – *sexual and intimate life* of austerity politics. As the introduction indicated, my aims, here, are two-fold: to highlight the importance of considering sexuality and intimacy within scholarly enquiry into austerity and other economic, political, and cultural formations; and to push for sexuality scholarship to take the non-identitarian and non-subject specific ways in which sexuality and intimacy operate and matter in the present more seriously. The questions that guide the analysis of this thesis are, thus, epistemological as well as theoretical, in that I am particularly interested in what we might find out about sexuality and intimacy in the austerity present – were we not to *a priori* decide exactly what they are and look like. Beginning with an open-ended research question – what kinds of sexual and intimate lives, subjects, and politics are made (im)possible, (il)legible, or (il)legitimate through and within austerity politics in the UK – means that my enquiry does not have a fixed starting point in particular sexual or gendered subjects (such as sexual minorities or women), or in particular policy or other sites within which we already know sexuality to matter (such as policies directly targeting, or media texts explicitly representing, sexual minorities or women). Instead, I focus on some of the *processes* by which sexuality and intimacy are folded into austerity politics – whichever sites these processes take place in and whichever subjects they may have an impact on.

This chapter makes two central arguments – firstly, that identity is *one* of sexuality's many modes of operation, and that paying attention to the non-identitarian and non-subject specific ways in which sexuality and intimacy operate is particularly important for understanding their relationship(s) to economic, political, and cultural formations – such as austerity. Secondly, I argue that sexuality is co-constituted with other

categories of difference in much more interrelated and interdependent ways than what tends to be assumed. I begin with a brief section that focuses on the broader question of how sexuality is conceived of in this thesis – highlighting specifically the theoretical foundations for engaging in an analysis of sexuality’s *non-identitarian* forms – as well as examines approaches that foreground sexual regulation. The following three sections each focus on a particular way of conceptualising sexuality and intimacy: as sexual subjectivity, as sexual inequality, and as intimate disruptions – each of which will be taken up and further investigated in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

As the introduction suggested, the methodological approach I take in this thesis is explorative – the methods employed in the following three chapters have been chosen because of their ‘fit’ with the case studies and the research sites the chapters’ analyses focus on. They follow on from the particular ways in which sexuality (or intimacy) is conceived in relation to the particular research sites, such that policy-as-discourse analysis is utilised to examine sexual inequalities in Chapter 3, a figurative methodology is employed to investigate the sexualisation and racialisation of the ‘benefit scrounger/recipient’ figuration in Chapter 4, and an analysis of processes of policy implementation and service delivery is used to examine the *intimate disruptions* they engender in Chapter 5. Since each method is directly linked not only to the particular research site but also to the conceptualisation of sexuality or intimacy I deploy in relation to that research site, the methods are introduced here rather than in a separate chapter. Each of the final three sections of this chapter, thus, discusses not only the conceptualisations of sexuality employed but also the methods utilised in the subsequent three chapters.

Sexuality: Procreation, Identity, Regulation

While the introduction covered my *personal* motivations for and investments in exploring sexuality through a non-identitarian lens in some detail, in this section I focus on the *theoretical* and *epistemological* foundations for doing so. My interest here is in unpacking and probing on

the term 'sexuality' itself, before moving onto the more specific ways in which it is deployed throughout this thesis in the rest of the chapter. I focus, firstly, on the interplay between the full array of sexual experiences, practices, subjectivities, identities, and affects on the one hand; and the dominant discursive deployments of sexuality as identities and/or as procreation on the other – the latter of which, I argue, always fails to capture the former in full. Secondly, I discuss *sexual regulation* – the approach this thesis loosely draws on throughout – making use of Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of disciplinary power. Finally, I briefly highlight the overall orientation of this thesis towards examining discursive and regulatory sites where sexuality is not explicitly marked. In this section my aim is to epistemologically and theoretically foreground this thesis' non-identity based analysis of sexuality and intimacy, focusing particularly on approaches that emphasise processes of sexual regulation over fixed identities or subject positions.

I begin with this much-quoted statement from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* regarding the variety in human (sexual) difference in order to highlight its continued relevance to the now, as well as specifically to my project:

Axiom 1: People are different from each other.

It is astonishing how few respectable conceptual tools we have for dealing with this self-evident fact. (1993: 247, emphasis in the original)

Indeed, the conceptual tools we have available for examining and theorising sexuality, sexual difference, and intimacy beyond sexual orientation or identity – or beyond biology and reproduction, depending on one's disciplinary location and attachments – continue to be limited. Sedgwick insists that even people of the same gender, race, nationality, class, and sexual identity or orientation can have profoundly different relationships to specific genital acts and gendered meanings; widely varying attachments to what counts as 'the sexual' in the first place; as well as different views as to

the importance of sexuality to their self-perceived identities.⁶² For her, these differences retain ‘the unaccounted-for potential to disrupt many forms of the available thinking about sexuality’ (*ibid.*: 249). The deceptively simple notion that humans differ greatly in their experiences of, and attachments to, sexuality along many other axes than just that of homosexual/heterosexual identification has significant consequences not only for how we conceptualise and theorise sexuality more broadly, but also for what we understand *sexual regulation* specifically to comprise.

Sedgwick goes on to discuss sexuality as ‘the array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity-formations, and knowledges, in both women and men, that tends to cluster most densely around certain genital sensations but is not adequately defined by them’ (*ibid.*: 251). The dominant discursive frameworks for comprehending and talking about sexuality tend to suppress this full ‘array’ of experiences, practices, subjectivities, affects, and identities in such a way that they are funnelled into the discrete categories of the heterosexual, (bisexual,) and homosexual, or perhaps into those of the procreative and non-procreative. This process of *funnelling* has been the subject of much queer historical work, taking its inspiration from Foucault. In the *History of Sexuality* Foucault (1998) argues that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries discourses around sex and sexuality increasingly concerned *deviant* and *perverse* sexuality, positioned in opposition to the norm of heterosexual coupledness. Four specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centring on sex were formed: the hysterisation of women’s bodies, the pedagogisation of children’s sex, the socialisation of procreative behaviour, and the psychiatrisation of perverse pleasure – from which the figures of ‘the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult’ (*ibid.*: 105) emerged. In discussing the emergence of the figure of the ‘perverse adult’, Foucault points at the emergence of homosexuality as a social category. His argument highlights the historically contingent and constructed nature of sexual identity categories – a notion subsequently

⁶² See also Hoad (2000) on how what counts as ‘sexual’ itself assumes a sameness and has a history – and, thus, needs to be historicised.

taken up in many scholarly accounts concerning both the historical and present formation of sexual identities.⁶³ For instance Margot Canaday (2009), following David Halperin's genealogical approach, conceptualises homosexuality as an effect of a *cumulative* process, whereby a range of prior discourses about sexuality and sexual deviance are held together in an unstable manner.

Sedgwick provides an important modification to Foucault's narrative about the development of modern-day homosexuality, however. She argues that Foucault's (as well as David Halperin's) account of the history of homosexuality is 'a unidirectional narrative of supersession' (1993: 263), in that it presumes that the old way of organising, and model of, same-sex relations is completely superseded by the new model – in this case, homosexuality and heterosexuality as discrete identity categories and subject positions. Conversely, for Sedgwick, different models may coexist: for instance, the 'old' emphasis on sexual acts over sexual identities continues to live on in popular discourse as well as in sodomy statutes. For the purposes of my project, it is important to differentiate between what the dominant discursive frameworks and the most commonly circulated narratives have to say about sexuality, on the one hand, and the ways in which sexuality is lived and experienced at the individual level, on the other. That there tends to be a significant distance between the two provides an important starting point for my project. The ways in which sexuality is lived and experienced in the everyday – the above-mentioned full array of experiences, practices, subjectivities, affects, and identities – is always in *excess* of the common narratives and dominant discourses about sexuality, which tend to either assume a clear homosexual/heterosexual distinction or be primarily concerned with procreation.

Although the subsequent pages of this thesis mostly examine *dominant* discourses and regulatory processes of austerity politics in order

⁶³ For historical analyses of the formation of sexual identities, see, for example, Halperin (1990) and Katz (1997). See also Hennessy (2000) for an account of how the formation of sexual identities is intrinsically linked to capitalism and its development; and Wittig for her famous argument that 'lesbians are not women', because "'woman" has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems' (1980: 110) – thus conceptualising 'lesbian' as a position of resistance.

to highlight the role that sexuality plays within them, they do not focus explicitly on dominant *sexuality* discourses – ‘dominant’ here referring to identitarian understandings of sexuality. The socially constructed, and therefore temporally and spatially contingent, nature of sexual identity categories can certainly be seen as one way to understand sexual regulation, and the discursive and regulatory processes by which specific sexual identities are constructed can, similarly, be examined in relation to political, economic, and cultural formations such as neoliberalisation or austerity. However, my overall aim in this thesis is not just to stress the importance of considering sexuality in scholarly analyses of political economic formations, but also to intervene epistemologically in sexuality scholarship to highlight the many *non-identitarian* ways in which sexuality matters in the present. I have, therefore, chosen not to focus on the potential regulatory interactions between austerity politics, on the one hand, and sexual identities or gendered subject positions, on the other – as many of the approaches discussed in the previous chapter do. Instead, my aim is, to borrow J. K. Gibson-Graham’s phrasing, ‘to clear a discursive space for’ (1996: xli) – and perhaps even, *à la* Sedgwick, provide some conceptual tools for theorising about – the many non-dominant and non-identitarian ways in which sexuality operates within austerity’s discursive and regulatory functioning.

To get at the ways in which sexuality is, in its non-identitarian senses, embedded and deployed in the discursive and regulatory functioning of austerity, my focus in this thesis overall is on processes of *sexual regulation*. I draw loosely on Foucault (1979) for my understanding of ‘sexual regulation.’ He argues that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a shift in regimes of punishment occurred in many Western societies, involving the increasing use of *disciplinary* technologies of power. Disciplinary power flows through the capillaries of the social body, as opposed to the operation of more traditional forms of repressive power in the hands of a sovereign ruler. Repressive, sovereign power is here contrasted with productive, normalising power, which operates on individual bodies. Importantly, however, disciplinary power has not fully replaced sovereign power but is, instead, operating alongside it. While

disciplinary power may be exercised by institutions, including the state, it is not restricted to its institutional deployments:

‘Discipline’ may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology. (*ibid.*: 215)

Disciplinary power is, thus, an individualising technology of power, centring on the individual body (*ibid.*; Foucault 1997).⁶⁴

For Foucault, the individual subject is ‘not the vis-à-vis of power; [but] one of its prime effects’ (1980: 98). As such, the production of *gendered* subjectivity has been one key way in which his account of disciplinary power has been taken up by feminist theorists. For example, Sandra Bartky’s (1988) influential essay deploys a Foucauldian conception of power to highlight the gendered nature of disciplinary practices; Susan Bordo analyses ‘the contemporary preoccupation with slenderness as it functions within a modern, “normalizing” machinery of power in general, and, in particular, as it functions to reproduce gender relations’ (1998: 215); and Jana Sawicki (1991) advances a Foucauldian analysis of how reproductive technologies discipline mothers. Sasho A. Lambevski’s (1999) analysis of the microphysics of power that operate through nationalist discourses on gay men’s bodies to structure and regulate their engagements in the gay scene in Skopje, Macedonia, provides an important example of the use of the Foucauldian concept of disciplinary power in queer scholarship. Many feminist and queer approaches, however, as well as utilising the Foucauldian notions of disciplinary power and subjectivation, also critique them. Elizabeth Grosz (1994), for example, points out that Foucault’s approach does not adequately account for the specific modes of *materiality* of racialised and sexed bodies.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Conversely, for Foucault, biopower – which emerged slightly after disciplinary power – is a ‘massifying’ one, not directed at ‘man-as-body but at man-as-species’ (Foucault 1997: 243).

⁶⁵ See also Stoler’s (1995) critique of Foucault, focusing on the colonial origins and nature of disciplinary power.

Many scholarly approaches such as the ones highlighted above – despite in their own right being important interventions into both the operation of disciplinary power and the processes of gendered subjectivation – begin with an assumption about the consequences of disciplinary processes for specifically gendered or sexualised bodies.⁶⁶ However, as Sedgwick argues in relation to gender, a great ‘heuristic leap of feminism has been the recognition that categories of gender and, hence, oppressions of gender can have a structuring force for nodes of thought, for axes of cultural discrimination whose thematic subject isn’t explicitly gendered at all’ (1993: 254).⁶⁷ While Sedgwick is specifically concerned with dichotomies such as nature/culture, active/passive, and public/private, her argument is also of a wider relevance. In this thesis I investigate the assumptions about, and the implications for, sexual and intimate lives, subjects, and politics embedded in particular policy and media sites – even when sexuality is not (and it usually is not) explicitly mentioned in them at all. Thus, my interest here is not as much in texts where, to use Sedgwick’s wording, ‘the culturally “marked” [sexuality] is [--] present as either author or thematic’ (*ibid.*: 254). Instead, I turn to texts that – despite their evident *lack* of the explicit cultural markers of sexuality, sexual identity, or sexual subjectivity – nonetheless depend on particular understandings and value judgements related to sexual and intimate lives and subjects and, thus, have significant implications for sexual politics.

Despite the above, sexuality does of course also pertain to identities and subjects. In the dominant discursive frameworks available for discussing and theorising sexuality, it is, further, frequently assumed to pertain *more* to sexual minority, LG(b), or queer identities and subjects than to straight, heteronormative ones. This does not, however, mean that it does not matter *at all* to subjects and identities other than *a priori* sexualised ones. Key to my investigations of sexual or sexualised subjectivities is, thus,

⁶⁶ Smith’s (2002) investigation into sexual regulation within welfare policy in the US provides a key exception to this tendency, as she – similarly to my analysis in Chapter 3 – thinks processes of sexual regulation and welfare reform together.

⁶⁷ Sedgwick’s (1993) overall project is here to examine the structuring force that the homosexual/heterosexual binary distinction has for Western nodes of thought.

another deceptively simple notion, this time by Avery Gordon – ‘that life is complicated’ (1997: 5). For her, this ‘is a theoretical statement that guides efforts to treat race, class, and gender dynamics and consciousness as more dense and delicate than those categorical terms often imply’ (*ibid.*: 5). The many axes of difference often grouped under the intersectional mantra of race, class, and gender,⁶⁸ as well as the oppressions resulting from them, are ‘*differently structured*’ (Sedgwick 1993: 253, emphasis in the original). They are also more complexly interrelated and interdependent than tends to be assumed by current conceptual tools and theoretical models, as Matt Wray (2006) argues. Thus, while my analysis in this thesis is intersectional in the sense that it does not treat sexuality as a *standalone* axis of difference, at the same time it does not examine sexuality as an identity *category* that neatly intersects with other identity categories.

Judith Butler (2008) and Cathy Cohen (1997) have both, albeit in rather different contexts and theoretical modalities, attempted to deal with the problems that arise from basing a politics on *personal* freedom or on identitarian claims. Instead, they focus on critiquing state violence (in Butler’s case), or on privileging one’s relation to power as a determinant of political collectivities (in Cohen’s case). Along somewhat similar lines, Davina Cooper suggests that while we may not want to let go of attending to ‘the inequalities associated with racializing, gendering, and economic processes, among others’, we may, in fact, want to let go ‘of the compulsion to attach inequality to identity-based groups’ (2014: 60). For her, this might mean ‘reading inequality as a problem of practices, spaces, and ways of living, or it might mean recognizing how historically contingent and incomplete the list of grounds actually is’ (*ibid.*: 60). My analysis attempts, similarly, to highlight the significant role that sexuality and intimacy play in structuring and underpinning inequalities generated or maintained by austerity politics – whether these inequalities attach to particular, for example racialised or classed, subjects, or instead to specific processes, practices, structures, or spaces. At times it is, indeed, judgements about the value of differently lived sexual and intimate lives that lead to inequalities,

⁶⁸ Especially following the seminal work of Crenshaw (1989, 1991).

but at other times sexuality plays more of a supporting role in the maintenance of, for instance, racialised and classed inequalities.

As mentioned above, throughout this thesis my focus is frequently on sites and texts that do not *explicitly* name sexuality or intimacy. This does not, however, mean that I am always concerned with *hidden* meanings over *surface* ones. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus (2009) discuss Ann Stoler's (2009) examination of imperial violence as an example of 'surface reading' and conclude that for Stoler the colonial state's interests in family life and intimacy are 'a genuine preoccupation, not [--] "metaphors for something else"' (Stoler cited in Best and Marcus 2009: 12).⁶⁹ My argument in Chapter 3 that poverty discourses are increasingly familialised and privatised, similarly, indicates a *genuine* policy preoccupation with the family and the private sphere. The sexual meanings and assumptions I trace across three policy texts in this chapter are not hidden in or by the texts themselves – although they may be less easily recognisable due to the overwhelming tendency to associate sexuality only or primarily with particular subjects.

In the case of Chapters 4 and 5, the situation is slightly more complex, however. In the former, I develop the methodological and conceptual approach of 'figurative economies' – explored in more detail below – to argue that the representational processes by which particular figurations are sexualised and racialised gain meaning *through* their participation in certain figurative economies. This approach allows for various *other* readings to also emerge, with the chapter's discussion pointing at the ways in which the texts' situatedness within certain prevalent figurative economies, nonetheless, conditions their reception. In the latter, the question of *intent* is deliberately left outside of the frame of analysis. Here my focus is on *processes* of service delivery and policy implementation, and the various intimate disruptions they engender in the lives of affected individuals. Whether these intimate disruptions are a 'genuine

⁶⁹ Best and Marcus's focus on 'surface reading' is part of a broader turn, particularly in literary studies, towards descriptive, surface-oriented, and/or empirical reading methods – which Love (2010, 2013) terms 'the descriptive turn.' See Felski (2015) on 'post-critical' reading, Latour (2004) on empiricism, Sedgwick (2003) on 'reparative' reading, and Love (2010, 2013) herself on 'close' reading.

preoccupation' of the state actors involved in these processes, however, is not explored. Rather, the central argument of the chapter is that the processes by which the state's functions and form are being shaped and shifted due to neoliberalisation (as I argued in the previous chapter) themselves materialise as certain significant disruptions in the intimate sphere – whether intentional or not. In the rest of this chapter I unpack in more detail the three conceptualisations of sexuality and intimacy employed and taken forward in the rest of the thesis' analysis: sexual subjectivities, sexual inequality, and intimate disruptions – with a concomitant focus on the three methods utilised: figuration, (policy-as-)discourse analysis, and analysis of processes of policy implementation and service delivery.

Sexual Subjectivities: Figuration

While my overall focus is on non-identitarian forms of sexuality and sexual regulation, sexual *subjectivities* do also form a part of this thesis' analysis. As mentioned above, generally the scholarly (and broader) tendency is to view as *sexual* subjects specifically those subjects who deviate from heterosexuality and heteronormativity – and whose subjectivation is, thus, often thought to be centrally structured by sexuality. Thus, the Foucauldian notion of the key sexual 'figures' – the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult – that emerged as part of the proliferation of sexuality discourses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, remains significant in that the extent to which particular subjects are considered *sexual* subjects tends to correlate with their *distance* from the heteronormative couple. However, a key argument this thesis makes in relation to sexual subjectivities is that it is not just sexual minority, LG(b), or queer subjects whose subjectivation involves and, indeed, depends on, processes of sexualisation. In the context of neoliberalising austerity politics, the forms of racialising, classing, and gendering that mark certain subjects as less or more valuable – and consequently, as less or more *deserving* – interact with, and in many cases depend on, processes of sexualisation, too. In this section I examine these processes of sexual subjectivation, as well as introduce the figurative methodological approach employed in Chapter 4.

Imogen Tyler argues that the representational struggles that generate and characterise social classifications 'are often played out within highly condensed figurative forms' (2008: 18). She develops a figurative methodology in order to examine the ways in which specific social types become overdetermined in excessive and caricatured ways in the public imaginary – in her case in the figuration 'the chav.' Figuration as a methodology has generated rich scholarship that has attended to figures or social types in which social classifications from race and class to religion, gender, sexuality, and age condense – although not all scholars working on the coalescing of social classifications into highly condensed 'types' in public imaginaries use the terminology of figuration. Wray (2006) and Premilla Nadasen (2007), for instance, employ the terminology of 'stereotypes' in their examinations of the 'white trash' and 'welfare queen' figurations, respectively; and Ange-Marie Hancock (2004) conceptualises 'the welfare queen' as a 'public identity.' Nonetheless, what is common in these accounts is their focus on unpacking the specific historical and contextual representational dynamics and struggles that have led to the condensation of social classifications into particular excessive caricatures in public imaginaries – as well as their emphasis on examining the political and cultural consequences of the circulation of such figurations within policy and media discourses.

Sara Ahmed focuses on figures as dense affective transfer points and argues that 'the construction of the bogus asylum seeker as a figure of hate also involves a narrative of uncertainty and crisis, but an uncertainty and crisis that *make that figure do more work*' (2004: 122, emphasis in the original). For her, the uncertainty of the narratives pertaining to the 'bogus asylum seeker' figuration relates to the impossibility of ever, with certainty, being able to tell the difference between 'bogus' and 'genuine' asylum seekers. Tyler, similarly, points out that 'ambivalence is the currency of the national abject insofar as it permits the endless reconfiguration of abject others' (2013: 9) in shifting historical and discursive contexts.⁷⁰ Figures,

⁷⁰ Tyler (2013) draws on Homi Bhabha's work both in her discussion of national abject figures and in her formulation of a figurative methodology.

thus, accumulate and are endowed with – usually negative – affect through their mediation and circulation, which is further aided by them not having a fixed reference point. Figurations are always *in excess* of what can be logically or empirically proven about particular subjects. However, despite the empirical *distance* between particular figurations and the subjects they supposedly pertain to, figures are, nonetheless, a *subjectifying force*, as Tyler (*ibid.*) suggests. Subjectivities are produced within a particular discursive context through processes of *interpellation*, whereby subjects are hailed into place as the social subjects of particular discourses (Blackman and Walkerdine 2001).⁷¹ As I discuss in more detail below, dense figurations, such as the ‘chav’ and the ‘bogus asylum seeker’, form a part of the broader discursive context within which subjectivation takes place and from which its discursive resources are drawn.

Ahmed further points out that proximity between figures may increase their power and affective resonance. She discusses the discursive ‘slide’ between the figures of the ‘bogus asylum seeker’ and the ‘terrorist’ and argues that the proximity and potential slippage between them does a lot of work: ‘it assumes that those who seek asylum, who flee from terror and persecution, may be bogus insofar as they could be the very agents of terror and persecution’ (2004: 136). As well as the slippage between *current* figurative formations, the affective resonance of figurations may increase through their association with earlier, historical figures. Tracey Jensen, for instance, argues that the ‘skiver inherits the ideological baggage of preceding abject figures; the single mother, the troubled family, the unemployed, absent or feckless father’ (2014). Thus, figures act as dense focal points of affective transfer, but, importantly, these affects animate and open up past histories. Ahmed bases her analysis on Franz Fanon’s (2008) often-cited passage describing his encounter with a white boy and his mother, in which the white boy’s fear ‘opens up past histories that stick to

⁷¹ Blackman and Walkerdine (2001) utilise Louis Althusser’s conceptualisation of ‘interpellation’, as do many other scholars who examine and theorise processes of subjectivation. On subjectivation, see also Butler (1990), Hall (1996) and Foucault’s works, as discussed above.

the present' (Ahmed 2004: 126).⁷² For Ahmed, Fanon's description of this encounter illustrates how histories of colonialism remain alive in the present because of the way in which they are reanimated by the circulation of affects. The past histories do not need to be named or, in fact, cognitively recognised, because the affective circulation alone 'sticks' certain histories to certain bodies. In other words, some objects or bodies are made to seem more 'fearsome' than others by the histories that stick to them.⁷³

In this thesis, figurations are, thus, conceptualised as dense focal points of affective transfer and accumulation, as well as sites for the animation of particular histories through the transfer of affect. Both Hancock (2004) and Tyler (2008, 2013) focus on the role of *disgust* in the circulation of their respective figurations. Hancock, for instance, argues that long-standing perceptions of black women as 'lazy' and 'promiscuous', imbricated with misperceptions about gender, race, and class, coalesce in the figure of the 'welfare queen.' As both Nadasen (2007) and Hancock (2004) point out, the figuration of the 'welfare queen' plays into public anxieties about *undeserving* welfare recipients.⁷⁴ In this thesis, similarly, the many figurations pertaining to benefit recipients – popularised and intensely circulated within austerity discourse – are intimately connected to imaginaries of *deservingness*. The 'benefit scrounger' and other similar figurations signify 'an underlying social crisis or anxiety' (Tyler 2008: 18). They play into anxieties about welfare dependency and are frequently deployed in policy and media discourses 'as symbolic and material scapegoats' (Tyler 2013: 9) for the 'overly generous' welfare state. As Jensen (2014) further, points out, it is particularly during (perceived) times of crisis, when new forms of *commonsense* are condensing, that figurations

⁷² See also Ahmed's (2000) analysis of Lorde's (1984) description of her bodily encounter as a child with a white woman – an encounter that similarly evokes histories of racism.

⁷³ Puar (2007) both engages with and adds an important corrective to Ahmed's account of the 'stickiness' of affects such as fear, as she highlights the importance of the *embodied* nature of encounters that are imbricated with racialised fear.

⁷⁴ Similarly to the anxieties about deservingness animated by the 'welfare queen', the 'chav' figuration represents social anxieties about the feared social mobility of the working classes, working-class women's reproduction and sexuality, and 'racial mixing' (Tyler 2008); and the 'bogus asylum seeker' animates anxieties about the permeability of both the physical borders of the nation-state and the symbolic boundaries of the social body (Ahmed 2004; cf. Tyler 2013; White 2014).

become essential scapegoats in national discourses.⁷⁵ Considering the frequent deployment of austerity rhetoric to signal an *exceptional* time of national crisis, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is no wonder that it is particularly at this time that these figurations have gained increasing representational force within public imaginaries.

However, my approach differs from most of the ones highlighted above in that, rather than necessarily in a specific figure, I am interested in the role that sexuality plays in the processes by which various figurations are condensed and circulated in the public imaginaries of austerity politics. Thus, while the above theorists tend to be concerned with the deployments and circulations of *a particular figuration*, my focus is on a loose *cluster* of figurations – those pertaining to benefit recipients, and frequently deployed within austerity discourses. In order to examine the role that sexuality plays within the consolidation and circulation of this cluster of figurations, in Chapter 4 I use and develop the methodological approach of ‘figurative economies.’ Here I draw on Ahmed’s work on ‘affective economies’, in which she argues that ‘affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an affect of the circulation between objects and signs’ (2004: 120). Similarly, in my analysis, figurations – or the discourses that cluster around them – do not originate or reside in particular representational objects, but rather circulate between them. Thus, a particular media text becomes one node within the broader figurative economies of the ‘benefit scrounger/recipient’, rather than the origin or destination of the discourses that cluster around this hybrid figuration. Further, and akin to Ahmed’s argument about affective accumulation over time, figurations can gain representational force as an effect of their movement between different representational objects: ‘the more they circulate, [--] the more they appear to “contain” affect’ (*ibid.*: 120) – or in my case, representational power and significance.

By extending figurative methodologies in this way, I am able to examine the entanglement of the various benefit recipient characters in my source materials in the figurative economies of the ‘benefit scrounger’, ‘skiver’, ‘chav’, and the single mother on benefits or ‘benefits-mum’

⁷⁵ See the next section for a discussion about ‘commonsense’ knowledges.

simultaneously. Further, this approach allows me to focus on the broader processes of sexualisation and racialisation that enable these characters to be read as belonging to the same figurative economies where the 'benefit scrounger' and 'chav' circulate. As should be clear by now, sexuality is not the sole social classification that condenses in the figuration of benefit recipients in the austerity era – racialisation, classing, gendering, and other processes also play a role, to varying degrees. Further, as highlighted in the previous section, these processes are not equivalent to one another but, instead, highly historically and contextually specific. Following Stoler's (1995, 2002) and Anne McClintock's (1995) work on the colonial production and regulation of race, sexuality, and class, Beverley Skeggs (1997, 2004) argues that a moral reading of women's bodies and (sexual) practices *initiated* the first class categories. For Skeggs, 'sex, gender and race difference were the means by which class came to be known, spoken, experienced and valued' (2004: 37). Class relations, thus, materialised and came into view through the trope of respectability in such a way that class judgements are intimately connected to judgements about (sexual) morality and respectability (Skeggs 2009a).⁷⁶ She argues that 'in any definition of respectability, sexuality lurks beneath the inscription' (2004: 38), highlighting the interrelatedness of processes of classing to sexuality discourses.

Skeggs's work, thus, importantly highlights not only the intimate relationship between class and sexuality in specific *historical* contexts, but it also points at the different ways in which processes of classing and sexualising operate and relate to each other in particular *discursive* contexts. For her, class and sexuality are not equivalent and coherent categories. Nor are they knowable in advance – her research specifically investigates the constitution of class as a social category *through* judgements of sexual morality and respectability. Another example of a detailed analysis of the different ways in which processes of social classification depend on other social classifications can be found in Stuart Hall and his colleagues' argument that 'race is the modality in which class is lived' (1978: 394) for

⁷⁶ On class and respectability politics, see also Alexander (1994) and Brown (2015).

the black British working class. Hall et al. view processes of racialisation as central to the construction of the black working class within the context of the 1970s moral panics about mugging. Both examples highlight the importance of not deciding in advance what constitutes class or race, or sexuality in a given context. As Juana Maria Rodriguez states in relation to her own work, 'rather than marshal the well-worn triad of race, gender, and sexuality as knowable and coherent categories, this text is invested in making visible the ways these terms are *activated* on the level of the psychic and the corporeal' (2014: 23, emphasis mine). Similarly, in this thesis, I am interested in examining the processes – of sexualisation, racialisation, gendering, and classing – that are *activated* to make a particular figuration coherent and legible.

Finally, I want to point at the interplay between processes of figuration and subjectivation, on the one hand, and that between subjectivation and identification, on the other. As highlighted above, figurations play a role in processes of subjectivation – despite their (both representational and affective) *excessiveness* in comparison to any particular subjects they may seek, or be deployed, to represent. While figurations are not directly attributable to particular subjects or bodies, their discursive and affective force may, nonetheless, extend to the ways in which certain bodies are read by others and, consequently, to the ways in which particular subjects are able to move in the world. Thus, the *hailing* of particular subjects into place as classed subjects, for example, is strongly interrelated to, and dependent on, the available discursive schema, of which the classed figurations of the 'benefit scrounger' or 'welfare dependent' 'skiver', for instance, form a key part.⁷⁷ For Ahmed (2004), figures are detached from particular bodies, but particular bodies may certainly be read as being more closely associated with certain figures. Thus, part of the work the figure of the 'terrorist', for example, does, is the 'could-be-ness' that allows for certain bodies to be read as *a priori* associated with terrorism. 'Fear sticks to these bodies [--] that "could be" terrorist' (*ibid.*: 135), with significant material

⁷⁷ See Tyler (2013) for multiple analyses of the ways in which various dense figurations are resisted and refused by those they claim to represent.

consequences for those repeatedly read in this way – from the state’s power to detain in Ahmed’s example, to increased surveillance, restricted mobility, and punitive welfare reforms in the case of other figurations.⁷⁸

As well as the relationship between figurations and processes of subjectivation, it is important to point at the interrelatedness of processes of subjectivation to identity formation. Hall argues that identities are ‘points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us’ (1996: 6).⁷⁹ For him, the ways in which particular people choose to represent or narrativise themselves are inseparable from the ways in which those people are and have been represented. Identities are, consequently, about ‘using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming (*ibid.*: 4). While individuals are unlikely to choose to identify exactly in alignment with particular figurations, identities are, nonetheless, produced within particular discursive contexts – which may or may not be limited as to the ways in which, for example, benefit recipients tend to be represented. In Chapter 4, I examine two media texts and question the extent to which the representation of certain key characters reflects the figurations that cluster around discourses of ‘benefit scrounging.’ Towards the end of the chapter my focus is on the ways in which these representations affect the legibility and legitimacy of working-class subjectivities in the context of austerity politics, thus highlighting the consequences of these discursive and figurative processes for both subjectivation and identification.

Thus, similarly to some of the approaches highlighted above, I am not just interested in the figurations themselves, but also in the political and cultural consequences of the proliferating representations of a particular cluster of benefit recipient figurations. Identities are not my starting point, but rather I arrive at the potential consequences for identity formation by examining the role that sexualisation and racialisation play in the

⁷⁸ See also Dermott and Pomati’s (2016) discussion of the policy implications of the proliferating use of the ‘benefit-scrounging’ lone mother figure; and Garthwaite (2011) and Runswick-Cole and Goodley (2015) on the, often violent, policy and other consequences of the increasing incorporation of people with disabilities under the discursive rubric of the ‘benefit scrounger’ figure.

⁷⁹ On identity formation, see also Clifford (2000).

representation of benefit recipients in two popular and well-known media texts. A figurative methodology allows me to emphasise the centrality of sexualisation and racialisation in the figuration of benefit recipients in the public imaginaries of austerity politics – without making claims about the (sexual) *identities* of benefit recipient individuals or populations. Further, it allows me to examine the ways in which common figurations of benefit recipients, and particularly their circulation within the figurative economies of austerity, may limit and restrict the subjectivities that are available for actual subjects to draw from in processes of identification. While these subjectivities may not be commonly seen as *sexual* subjectivities, I, nonetheless, conceptualise them as such. Doing so allows me to both conceptually and epistemologically foreground and question the overwhelming tendency to view as sexual subjectivities only those that deviate from the heteronorm – despite the key role that sexuality plays in subjectivities other than ones predefined as sexual.

Sexual Inequalities: (Policy-as-)Discourse Analysis

In the previous section I focused on how processes of subjectivation interact with and draw from dense figurations, made a case for conceptualising *as* sexual subjectivities those subject positions that depend on sexualisation for their legibility – even when they do not conform to the dominant discursive framings of sexuality as sexual identity – and introduced the figurative methodology employed in Chapter 4. In this section I move on to conceptualising *sexual inequality* and introducing the method – policy-as-discourse analysis – that follows from this conceptualisation and is used in Chapter 3. Here my focus is, firstly, on discourse generally and, secondly, on *sexuality* discourses more specifically. I highlight heteronormativity and homonormativity as key sites for the ‘putting into discourse of sex’ (Foucault 1998: 12), focusing particularly on the co-constitution of sexuality discourses with various social, cultural, and political formations. These formations include, but are not limited to, the nation-state and its institutions and practices, thus foregrounding my own analysis of the production and reproduction of sexuality discourse within the social,

cultural, political, and policy formations of austerity. I then make a case for the conceptualisation of sexuality, as it interacts with and is embedded in policy formations, through the framework of sexual inequality. I have chosen this as Chapter 3's heuristic specifically to draw attention to the operation of sexuality within policy arenas where the cultural markers of sexual identity or subjectivity are not present or visible. Finally, this section introduces and justifies the specific method of policy-as-discourse analysis employed in Chapter 3.

Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland provide a simple definition of discourse as 'language use relative to social, political and cultural formations' (2006: 3). Not dissimilarly, Norman Fairclough considers discourse as 'language as a form of social practice' (2001: 16) and as 'language use conceived of as socially determined' (*ibid.*: 18). Irreducibly social phenomena, discourses influence social structures and contribute to social continuity and change, as well as being themselves determined by social structures. Importantly, then, discursive enunciations always have a history, in that discourse 'accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices' (Butler 1993: 19). A statement can only function authoritatively because of the accumulating historicity of discourse and, consequently, 'pre-existing linguistic repertoires are constitutive of cultural meaning' (De Benedictis 2012: 2). Thus, power relations are exercised and enacted within discourse, and dominant orders of discourse are themselves constituted by relations of power, as Fairclough (2001) argues – but it is precisely because of the historicity of discourse that it materialises as a site for the enactment and maintenance (as well as sometimes, challenging) of power relations. Furthermore, as Hall et al. (1978) point out, since a limited range of explanatory paradigms for any given phenomenon exists within the dominant orders of discourse, public opinion tends to be constructed out of the vocabularies and ideologies available within dominant discursive frameworks.

One of the key ways in which discourses are imbricated with power is through the production and reproduction of *commonsense* knowledges.⁸⁰ Commonsense refers to *that which goes without saying*, tacit knowledge that has become embedded in public discourse – and often, consequently, in public opinion – through its naturalisation. Because commonsense knowledge has lost its connection to particular ideologies or political preferences, it is ‘hard to pin down in the moment of its formation, often leaving no inventory once it has dissipated’ (Jensen and Tyler 2015: 473). Lauren Berlant argues, similarly, that claims about the world – in her case the prevalent discourse of the ‘American Dream’ – are at their most powerful when they ‘become banal [--]: no longer inciting big feelings and deep rages, [they] seem hardwired into what is taken for granted in collective national life’ (1997: 11). Because what is ‘common’ about commonsense is precisely ‘that it is not subject to tests of internal coherence and logical consistency’ (Hall et al. 1978: 150), it functions to make the social world, and especially the power relations and hierarchies contained within it, appear self-evident and as though they require no interpretation. Moreover, individual experiences that run counter to the prevailing commonsense can, consequently, appear as exceptions within a larger truth, as Hall et al. (1978) suggest.

Critical discourse analysis – which I broadly align my own approach with – thus involves a questioning of practices ‘that produce apparent objectivity, normality and factuality’ (Jaworski and Coupland 2006: 27). As highlighted in the previous chapter, neoliberalisation has tended to involve its presentation as somehow inevitable, as beyond political debate and judgement. Thus, many scholarly analyses of neoliberalisation, specifically, have utilised critical discourse analysis to question the supposed objectivity and rationality of neoliberal logics. Critical discourse analysis involves probing texts and discourses ‘in order to discover *hidden* meaning and value-structures’ (*ibid.*: 28, emphasis mine). However, particular meanings, values, and power structures can be hidden in texts for different reasons. In

⁸⁰ On commonsense, or commonsense knowledges, see Bourdieu (1984, 1998), Fairclough (2001), Hall et al. (1978), Jaworski and Coupland (2006), Jensen (2014), and Stoler (2009).

her analysis of imperial violence, Stoler, for example, attempts to 'distinguish between what was "unwritten" because it could go without saying and "everyone knew it," what was unwritten because it could not yet be articulated, and what was unwritten because it could not be said' (2009: 3). Further, commonsense is subject to change over time. Therefore, I am also interested in the shifts and changes that have occurred, or are occurring, in commonsense notions about sexuality within the context of austerity politics.

Examining the discursive production of sexuality involves asking questions such as:

Why has sexuality been so widely discussed, and what has been said about it? What were the effects of power generated by what was said? What are the links between these discourses, these effects of power, and the pleasures that were invested in them? What knowledge [--] was formed as a result of this linkage? (Foucault 1998: 11)

Investigating the commonsense knowledges about sexuality involves a focus on their *denaturalisation*, in order to make visible what is assumed, without questioning, about sexuality in a particular discursive formation. A frequent commonsensical assumption about sexuality is its presumed alignment with particular identities, and relatedly, the presumed fixity, stability, and separateness of such identities. This echoes Fairclough's discussion of power's capacity to impose and maintain a particular structuring of a particular social domain – in this case, that of sexuality – including 'dividing it into parts, [--] keeping the parts demarcated from each other, and a particular ordering of those parts in terms of hierarchical relations of domination and subordination' (2001: 10-11). Sexuality's discursive production also involves various commonsensical assumptions about what those identities look like, how desire functions in alignment with them, what kinds of subjects inhabit them, and what kinds of sexual and intimate behaviour these subjects engage in. Finally, the discursive production of sexuality involves not just descriptive assumptions – about what sexuality *is* – but also normative and prescriptive judgements – about what kind of sexuality is *appropriate* or *acceptable*.

Jaworski and Coupland argue that ‘discourse analysis offers a means of exposing or deconstructing the social practices that constitute “social structure” and what we might call the conventional meaning structures of social life’ (2006: 5). One such ‘conventional meaning structure’ of social, or in this case particularly – but, importantly, not solely – of *sexual* life, is that of heteronormativity. Foucault’s (1998) discussion of the status of the monogamous, heterosexual, procreative couple as the *norm* is echoed by many sexuality and queer theory scholars, who direct attention to the ways in which commonsense assumptions about heterosexuality’s primacy and normative status constitute social structure. Gayle Rubin influentially argues that Western societies ‘appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value’ (1993: 151), in which marital, reproductive heterosexual sex is valued most highly, while the heterogeneous array of other possible sex acts and practices – ranging from non-procreative heterosexual sex, gay and lesbian sex, and masturbation, to sex work, promiscuous sex, and trans-generational sex, among others – is seen as less valuable.⁸¹ Importantly, however, as Cooper (1993) points out, Rubin’s account pertains primarily to the subordination of non-heterosexual and non-procreative sexual acts and practices at the level of *public discourse* – rather than social practice.

Many other scholars have pointed at the material and cultural consequences of the pervasiveness of heteronormativity – here conceived both as the normativity of *heterosexuality vis-à-vis* non-heterosexual sexual acts, practices, and identities, and as the normativity of *procreative* sexuality *vis-à-vis* non-procreative sexualities. Rodriguez, for instance, points at the procreative/non-procreative binary and argues that the non-reproductive sexual pleasures of women of colour and women with disabilities ‘have often borne the brunt of eugenics practices and institutionalization’ (2014: 13). Here she highlights, similarly to Rubin, that a whole range of sexual acts and practices have been subordinated by and within heteronormativity – and not just ones arising from or related to homosexual identities – but she also directs attention at the often violent and coercive consequences of that

⁸¹ See also Butler (1990) on the ‘heterosexual matrix’, Rich (1980) on the ‘lesbian continuum’, and Warner (1991) on ‘queer’ defined against notions of ‘the normal’ more generally.

subordination. Cohen, similarly, argues that heteronormativity is not just about the subordination of sexualities, but it also 'works to support and reinforce institutional racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation' (1997). These scholars, thus, foreground heteronormativity's embeddedness in other social structures, cultural formations, and political life. As Berlant and Michael Warner argue,

A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality [--]. Heteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life. (1998: 554)

Similarly, in this thesis I examine heteronormativity particularly in terms of its embeddedness within the social, political, and cultural formations of austerity.

More recently many queer theorists have focused on *homonormativity* instead of, or in addition to, *heteronormativity*. Lisa Duggan, for example, examines the cultural politics of neoliberalism in the United States from the 1970s onwards – as highlighted in the previous chapter – and argues that processes of neoliberalisation have included an 'emergent rhetorical commitment to diversity, and to a narrow, formal, nonredistributive form of "equality" politics for the new millennium' (2003: 44). A new form of gay politics that she terms 'the new homonormativity' (*ibid.*: 50) accompanies this equality politics, whereby mainstream, conventional gay representation is accepted and even celebrated, but in an increasingly narrow form. Jasbir Puar (2007), in turn, links forms of homonormativity to contemporary US imperialism and its national and transnational political agendas, in order to develop the concept of *homonationalism*. For her, homonationalism is 'a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality' (Puar 2013: 337). Both Puar and Duggan, thus, importantly illustrate the embeddedness of *homosexuality* discourses and regulatory

practices in the political, economic, and cultural formations of neoliberalism, imperialism, and colonialism.

While I agree with scholars of homonormativity and homonationalism that the recent shifts in the relationships between nation-states, (neoliberal) capitalism, and sexuality deserve attention, at the same time I also find value in Nikita Dhawan's (2016) critique of some of the subsequent uses of both concepts.⁸² She expresses worry about the increasing scholarly focus on homonormativity and nationalism, especially when they are given centre stage over and instead of continuing to examine the persisting primacy of heteronormativity in many contexts. While she agrees that queer politics should not be limited to contesting heteronorms, she, at the same time, argues that 'despite homonationalism and the folding of queers into nation-building, nations – whether Western or non-Western are deeply heteronormative. Heterosexuality is ritually invoked to narrate the nation and keep it together' (*ibid.*: 57). Consequently, scholarly approaches that investigate the relationship between heteronormativity and the nation-state continue to be relevant. For instance, Patricia Hill Collins (1999) and Nira Yuval-Davis (1998) – although explicitly focusing on gender rather than sexuality – direct attention to the ways in which women's sexualities, and particularly their reproductive behaviours, are regulated as part of the processes of nation building. Collins specifically highlights the different ways in which differently racialised women are folded into national imaginaries, and their sexual behaviours, consequently, regulated by the state.

In a slightly different vein to Collins and Yuval-Davis, queer migration scholars have pointed at the embeddedness of regimes of sexual regulation within migration regimes, as well as specifically at how these interactions figure in processes of nation-building. Eithne Luibhéid (2006) argues that the regulation of sexuality – in her case, specifically the regulation of

⁸² See also Brown's (2012, 2015) critique of the notion of homonormativity. He investigates the ways in which 'normative social attitudes to both heterosexual and homosexual relations are changing in the current period' and argues that 'the faultline of sexual politics in the UK has shifted from being placed (primarily) along the homo/hetero binary' (2015: 976). Brown's analysis bears certain similarities to mine, particularly in that I also observe certain key shifts in an 'emerging sexual politics of austerity' (*ibid.*: 976).

women's bodies and sexualities that occurs through controlling access to abortion in Ireland – together with its interactions with state practices such as immigration controls, functions to *rebound* the nation-state. Similarly, scholarship on queer asylum and migration importantly highlights the effect the investment of the state in determining whether migrants are, indeed, gay or lesbian, has both on constraining and constituting the applicants' sexualities and on reaffirming the boundaries of the nation-state *through* the regulation of sexuality.⁸³ Such approaches make important contributions specifically to understandings of how sexual identities are regulated in interactions with migration regimes and other state processes. However, they differ from mine in that their focus tends to remain firmly on subjects and subjectivities *a priori* defined as either gendered or sexual. Thus, while they constitute important interventions in their own right, their investigative reach is limited to the consequences of sexual regulation for particular subjects – usually women and/or sexual minorities – and the interrelatedness of such regulatory processes to processes of nation or state-building.

The approach I take is to *not* decide in advance which subjects will be affected by processes of sexual regulation in a particular context. While heteronormativity forms a part of my analysis, particularly in Chapter 3, it alone is insufficient as a conceptual frame for examining the regulation of sexuality within austerity politics. Thus, in Chapter 3, I conceptualise sexual regulation as the creation and maintenance of *sexual inequalities* – which may in some cases, indeed, be the result of pervasive heteronormativity, but in others may not. I do so in order to advance the kind of scholarship (and politics) that, to paraphrase Dhawan (2016), is complex and multidirectional, directed at regulatory practices across the heterosexual/homosexual and the procreative/non-procreative divides. As I explore in more detail in Chapter 3, Clare Hemmings (2014), in her discussion of Butler's (1997) and Nancy Fraser's (1997) disagreement concerning the relationship between sexuality and the political economy,

⁸³ On queer asylum and migration, see, for instance, Lewis (2014), Luibhéid (1998), Shuman and Bohmer (2014), Spruce (2014), and White (2014).

argues that both theorists fail to consider either other sexual identities (other than gay and lesbian) or other kinds of *sexual inequalities*. This continued reliance on the homosexual/heterosexual opposition, for Hemmings, ‘skews our perception of historical change with respect to the relationship between sexuality and political economy’ (2014: 375). My approach in Chapter 3, thus, follows such critiques and, instead, investigates a particular policy site for the sexual inequalities that are created or maintained within it – even though the policy texts themselves do not explicitly mention sexuality.

One key way in which the discursive production of sexuality in relation to various cultural, political, and economic formations – such as the nation-state, neoliberalisation, and austerity – has been examined is through analyses of policies or policy texts. Cris Shore and Susan Wright (1997) suggest that policies are usefully viewed as instruments of power – or in Foucauldian (1975) terms, as *technologies* of power.⁸⁴ The primary goal of policy language is usually to persuade rather than to inform, as Raymond Apthorpe (1997) argues, and they, consequently, tend to act as prescriptive discursive devices rather than descriptive ones. Policy texts are *performative* in the sense that they seek to create a world by describing it – or in the words of Shore and Wright, they ‘contain implicit (and sometimes explicit) models of society’ (1997: 6). Given their prescriptive nature, policies do not just *respond* to problems that exist in society. Rather, “problems” are “created” or “given shape” in the very policy proposals that are offered as “responses” (Bacchi 2000: 48). It is, thus, the *problematization* of particular issues that generally offers a useful starting point for policy analysis, rather than the problems explicitly presented in policy texts themselves.

‘Policy-as-discourse analysis’ (Bacchi 2000: 52), thus, involves uncovering the ways in which policies tend to disguise their own operation as technologies of power, as well as unpacking their *problematization* of certain issues over others. Welfare policy, and more recently the

⁸⁴ See also Carabine’s (2001) detailed discussion of Foucault in relation to welfare policy specifically.

constellation of welfare policies and ‘reforms’ implemented under the rhetorical rubric of austerity, has been a popular topic for policy-as-discourse analysis. Because the prescriptive (and thus political) nature of policies and policy texts is often disguised by the legal-rational, objective language in which they are portrayed (Shore and Wright 1997), policy-as-discourse analysis is especially pertinent to the context of neoliberal austerity politics, where policy choices and preferences are frequently presented as economic necessity or simply common sense.⁸⁵ The emphasis of many of these recent accounts is on how policy discourse sets limits on what can be said and on how it defines the discursive terrain in such a way that complicates efforts to achieve political change. Fairclough (2001) stresses, however, that at different times achieving political change might necessitate either conservative discursive reproduction *or* transformations in orders of discourse. Thus, it is important for policy-as-discourse analysis to pay attention to where the *epistemic gain* of particular discursive positions lies – or in other words, who benefits from the maintenance or transformation of particular discursive orders, and what institutional or ideological arrangements are maintained or changed by them.⁸⁶

Finally, policies have cultural and political effects beyond the immediate policy arena within which they are situated and which they seek to change. As John Clarke points out, these cultural effects may include determining or affecting ‘the meanings, conditions and identities of citizenship’ (2004: 37). Thus, policy texts can be explored for the cultural resources they deploy, the cultural effects they aim to produce, and the cultural conflicts they attempt to resolve. In Chapter 3, I employ a policy-as-discourse approach in order to examine the commonsensical assumptions about sexuality embedded in a set of policy texts that *problematise* poverty as a *cultural* issue – rather than an economic one. Reading the policy texts as political and cultural texts that contain political narratives intended to

⁸⁵ See the previous chapter, as well as Clarke and Newman’s in-depth discussion about the ‘shape changing’ of austerity discourse, whereby it has, at least in the UK, shifted ‘from an economic problem (how to “rescue” the banks and restore market stability) to a political problem (how to allocate blame and responsibility for the crisis)’ (2012: 300).

⁸⁶ For a more detailed discussion of ‘epistemic gain’ in relation to discourse, see Fairclough (2006).

performatively enact a particular kind of social and sexual world, I employ policy-as-discourse analysis as my method in order to direct attention at the ways in which the problematisation of poverty as cultural helps maintain particular sexual inequalities – whichever subjects those inequalities may pertain to. This approach also allows me to consider the wide-ranging cultural and political effects of these discursive and regulatory processes – potential shifts in regimes of citizenship, as well as significant consequences for the scope and nature of class analysis and discourse, in the case of Chapter 3.

Intimate Disruptions: Policy Implementation and Service Delivery

Apart from the discursive production of sexuality, the resultant sexual inequalities, and the part that sexuality plays in the related processes of figuration and subjectivation, this thesis is concerned with, and examines, sexuality *as* or *in relation to* intimacy. In this section, I foreground my conceptualisation of intimacy as both separate from and, at the same time, closely related to sexuality, as well as introduce the methodological approach employed in Chapter 5. I use the frame of intimacy precisely because it allows me to widen my focus, and enables me to draw attention to a whole range of intimate practices, relations, and spaces that, as I argue in Chapter 5, are *disrupted* by and within the operation of penalising austerity politics. Some of these intimate relations and practices may be sexual, and some of them may be familial – however, they are not necessarily either. Thus, deploying intimacy as my frame of analysis enables me, akin to the many queer theorists and sexuality scholars who use the language of intimacy, to question and probe some of the assumptions that are frequently made about the nature and location of close, intimate relationships and practices. Finally, the methodological shift I take by focusing not on policy *texts*, but on the *processes* of policy implementation and service delivery – as I explain in more detail below – enables me to move beyond the question of intent, and beyond the world that the policy texts themselves seek to bring into being. Instead, my focus is on the implications that materialise in the intimate sphere as a result of the policy processes, regardless of the ways in

which the intentions of the policies are described in the policy-makers' own language.

As the above two sections have highlighted, sexuality discourses often contain implicit judgements about the *value* of differently lived sexual and intimate lives. These value judgements can materialise in particular sexual inequalities that originate in certain discursive framings of sexuality, or they can be enacted in the sexualisation of particular figurations and subjectivities. These discursive and regulatory processes mark certain sexual and intimate lives as less or more appropriate and valuable than others. As suggested above, frequently it is specifically heteronormative coupledness that is seen as the appropriate site for expressing and experiencing of sexuality. Conversely, for instance the promiscuously lived sexual life of a single mother tends to be judged as inappropriate, of less value, or even immoral. Thus, similarly to the ways in which sexuality is always at the individual level lived *in excess* of the dominant discursive frameworks available for describing and categorising sexuality, lived experience also exceeds the normative ways of organising and talking about intimacies. Recent scholarship has, however, tended to emphasise certain shifts in the organisation of intimacy at a societal level. Anthony Giddens (1992) describes what he conceptualises as the 'transformation of intimacy' and argues that the emergence of *plastic* sexuality – freed from the constraints of reproduction – has the potential to democratise sexual and private lives. Zygmunt Bauman (2003), somewhat similarly, conceptualises modern fluid and dynamic relationship bonds as 'liquid love.'⁸⁷ What these approaches share is an emphasis on the role of agency and choice in intimate lives, as well as a tendency to characterise intimacies as in the process of democratisation or diversification.

While I certainly agree with the above theorists that changes and shifts have occurred, and are occurring, in patterns of intimacy, I do not share their optimism as to the increasingly democratic or agentic nature of

⁸⁷ See also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Weeks et al. (2001), who make similar arguments about the transformation of intimacy in contemporary Western societies.

‘modern’ intimacies.⁸⁸ These approaches significantly underestimate the continued primacy of certain normatively organised intimacies – in particular that of heterosexual coupledness and the nuclear family. They also underestimate the *hold* that these normative intimacies continue to have on both individual and national imaginaries, as well as the significant and persisting ways in which their primacy is reproduced and maintained both within policy arenas and in broader cultural and political logics and formations. Berlant (2011) argues that normative intimacies play a central role in the relationships between citizen-subjects and the state under conditions of neoliberalisation and precarisation.⁸⁹ For her, precarious subjects reinvest in normative intimacies when they no longer have reciprocal relationships with the state, despite the fact that these investments are precisely what forecloses other political possibilities for them – a relation she terms ‘cruel optimism.’ The dissatisfaction of citizens ‘leads to reinvestment in the normative promises of [--] intimacy under capital’ (*ibid.*: 170), thus enabling one ‘to imagine that having a friend, or making a date, or looking longingly at someone who might, after all, show compassion for our struggles, is really where living takes place’ (*ibid.*: 189). For Berlant, these reinvestments are bound up in a desire to feel normal, and for normalcy, in turn, to provide the basis for a reliable and predictable life.

Viewing normativity and normative intimacies, like Berlant does, as ‘an evolving and incoherent cluster of hegemonic promises about the present and future experience of *social belonging*’ (*ibid.*: 167, emphasis mine), also helps direct attention to their role in regimes of citizenship. As well as a formal and informal institution of social belonging, citizenship, for Berlant, is ‘an affective state where attachments that matter take shape’ (*ibid.*: 163). Citizenship, thus, operates as a guarantee of social reciprocity only in *fantasmatic registers*, in such a way that fantasies of reciprocity, together with attachments to normative intimacies, condition and shape

⁸⁸ See also Taylor’s (2013) critique concerning the classed presuppositions underpinning such approaches.

⁸⁹ See also Ahmed on ‘how happiness functions as a promise that directs us toward certain objects, which then circulate as social goods’ (2010: 29).

one's sense of belonging. Berlant's theorising of the fantasy life of citizenship not only highlights how social belonging reproduces – and, indeed, *depends on* the reproduction of – particular normative intimacies, but it also places conceptualisations of sexual or intimate citizenship in a new light.⁹⁰ *Some* sexual citizenship literatures have tended to share the optimism of the 'transformation of intimacy' thesis, in that they see citizenship as *ever-expanding*, progressively including more and more citizen-subjects fully in the fold of the nation. However, what does it mean for celebratory accounts of sexual citizenship, if citizenship is about the 'activity of performative belonging to the now in which potentiality is affirmed' (*ibid.*: 261), rather than about any real reciprocity or material guarantees for the liveability of life?

The fantasy life of normativity and normative intimacies in particular, thus, in significant and enduring ways shape both individual and national imaginaries. These fantasies and attachments are what bind us to the nation in the face of decreasing reciprocity between the state and its subjects and citizenship norms are also, in turn, shaped by normativity, as Berlant (1997) argues centrally in her earlier work. As Tam Sanger and Yvette Taylor highlight, '*who* is properly proximate to intimacy may also be recognised as a proper citizen, a legal subject, a welfare recipient, a familial member and a coherent, legitimate "partnered" person' (2013: 3, emphasis in the original). Gavin Brown goes as far as to suggest that 'proximity to "proper" expressions of intimacy and care has come to shape' norms of citizenship 'more than sexual identity itself' (2015: 978). Clearly then, citizenship as an institution of social belonging is involved in the reproduction of certain normative intimacies, and heteronormativity in particular continues to be central to regimes of national belonging. Amy Brandzel (2005) argues that citizenship is *in itself* necessarily normative and exclusive, as any increases in inclusion work through a process of creating a

⁹⁰ On sexual and intimate citizenship, see for example Brandzel (2005), Josephson (2005), Lister (2007), Payne and Davies (2012), Richardson (2000), Stychin (2000, 2001), Taylor (2011), and Weeks (1998).

dominant 'we', thus enacting further exclusions.⁹¹ I, further, agree with Taylor (2013) that it is particularly in new citizenship moments, when specific new intimacies are privileged, that others tend to be delegitimised or rendered illegible.

As well as significant to *imaginaries* of citizenship and *symbolic* belonging, intimacy is also central to institutional practices and policy implementation, as Sanger and Taylor suggest (2013). According to Taylor, 'intimate relationships are brought into being, and negated, in interaction with institutional frameworks and through intersecting legal and material (im)possibilities' (2013: 18). These 'intersecting legal and material (im)possibilities' have been the subject of much queer and sexuality scholarship, as queer migration scholars, for instance, have examined the ways in which intimacy norms are created and maintained through immigration regimes – thus regulating and conditioning the intimate lives of those who pass through them. Melissa Autumn White's analysis of queer migration documents as archives of intimacy and trauma illustrates how, in the context of Canadian family reunification laws, both heterosexual and same sex couples have to *perform* 'a normative (read "heteronormative"), intelligible story of intimacy' (2014: 78). Ala Sirriyeh's (2015) examination of recent changes in UK family reunification laws, similarly, highlights that immigration regimes involve an implicit assessment of how people feel about the nation. Importantly, this assessment takes place *through* judgements about their choice of partner and relationship, and 'a hierarchical ordering of the value of their relationship' (*ibid.*: 236).⁹² White goes on to ask,

Given the complex gendered, sexual, and racialized (as white/whitened) normativities that underpin tropes of conventional love and romance in Western and Northern contexts, what does it mean to document recognizable intimacy for immigration other than to reconsolidate, even while fraying, these norms? (2014: 79)

⁹¹ See also critiques of the notion of sexual or intimate citizenship by Josephson (2005), Lamble (2014), and Stychin (2000, 2001).

⁹² On intimacy and immigration regimes, see also Fassin (2010).

For both, an affinity to *normative intimacy* is, thus, expected, performed, and reinforced in encounters between individuals or couples and immigration regimes.

Judgements about the value and appropriateness of particular intimacies are also central to institutional and policy arenas other than migration. Welfare states, for instance, play a key role in the regulation of intimacy, as well as, relatedly, in the formation and maintenance of boundaries between public and private, as many others (Clarke 2004; Lewis 2000; Lister 2000) have argued. What is considered private and, thus, *beyond* both public life and state intervention, is profoundly shaped by intimacy norms and their interactions with state institutions, practices, and policies. Further, the public/private dichotomy has historically tended to be maintained on account of the most privileged subjects, whereas the lines have always been considerably more blurred for marginalised populations – for whom state intervention has often been all too common, as Susan Boyd (1997), for instance, highlights. When the deconstruction of the public/private binary became central to feminist projects and scholarship – due to its role in the maintenance and reproduction of the patriarchal status quo within the household – it was black feminist and feminist of colour critiques that pointed out that the family has often been a site of *resistance* to women of colour.⁹³ Thus, while the state may *appear* absent from the ‘private’ sphere, it tends to be just the white, (hetero)normative nuclear family, and their normatively organised intimacies, that are viewed as protected by a zone of privacy. While freedom or liberation from patriarchal norms and power dynamics within the family may be central to liberal feminist projects, it is often freedom *from* state intervention in the ‘private’ sphere or intimate life that is more of a priority in the lives of marginalised (particularly classed and racialised) populations.

State interventions in the private sphere and state regulation of intimacies are central to my analysis in Chapter 5. Similarly to many of the accounts above, I deploy the frame of intimacy precisely because it is

⁹³ On more detailed interventions in feminist challenges to the public/private divide, see, for example, Alexander (1994), Carby (1982), and Mahmood (2005).

broader than that of sexuality. What kinds of relationships are considered 'sexual', 'familial', or 'intimate', is a judgement already structured by heteronormative notions of *appropriately* organised sexual and intimate lives. My use of the frame of intimacy in Chapter 5 is, thus, motivated by a desire to avoid making such judgements in advance. Further, as the chapter's examination illustrates, to focus purely on disruptions to *sexual* lives would mean drawing a rather arbitrary distinction, since the ways in which intimate lives are disrupted by various state processes knows no such borders. The *range* of intimate relations, practices, and spaces that are potentially under the purview of state regulation and intervention, thus, exceeds not only the bounds of sexual subjectivity or identity, as highlighted above, but also those of *the sexual* altogether. While some of the relations, practices, and spaces that the state intervenes in, as examined in Chapter 5, may, indeed, be sexual in nature, others may not – friendships, caring relationships, or, for instance, professional relationships may be just as, or even more, intimate than familial and sexual relationships. With Berlant, I am here particularly interested in 'minor intimacies', or 'desires for intimacy that bypass the couple or the life narrative' (1998: 285), thus centralising state intervention in intimate relations, practices, and spaces that may not be legible as intimacy at all, because they circumvent the (hetero)normative life narrative.

My analysis in Chapter 5 epistemologically foregrounds the question of what kinds of value judgements about intimate relations, practices, and spaces may be embedded in certain institutional and policy implementation processes – despite the fact that these processes are not *seemingly* at all concerned with the regulation of sexuality or family life. Whether the judgements of value and appropriateness embedded in various forms of state intervention are *intentional* or not, however, is beside the point. Somewhat contrary then to, for example, Stoler's (2009) investigation of the colonial *preoccupation* with intimacy and family life discussed above (as well as to my own analysis in Chapter 3), I am here not concerned with whether the state *seeks* to limit and restrict the intimate lives of particular individuals or populations. Rather, I focus on how these intimate lives are,

regardless of intention, restricted or limited because of particular policy or institutional processes within austerity politics. However, the possible lack of intention does not preclude the significance of these intimate disruptions for *state power*. Jyoti Puri examines the movement to decriminalise homosexuality in India and argues that what became apparent through the encounters between state institutions and activists is the ‘state’s recourse to sexuality in order to govern’ (2014: 344). Somewhat similarly, I consider the intimate disruptions that materialise as a result of various state processes and policies as important everyday state practices that help maintain the cultural *myth* of the bounded, coherent, and monolithic state.⁹⁴

Due to my divestment from questions of intent, my focus in Chapter 5 is on the *processes* of implementation and service delivery – rather than on the explicit aims and intentions of particular policies found in policy texts. There is often a significant difference between the two, as policies transform and mutate during the process of implementation due to, for example, path dependence and the actions and preferences of street level bureaucrats.⁹⁵ My archive in this chapter, consequently, consists of texts that detail the ways in which street-level decision making proceeded in the case of particular policies or systems: UK Supreme Court judgements related to three high profile cases from 2013, 2015, and 2016. For the same reason, my methodological approach in Chapter 5 is also somewhat different from that of the previous two chapters – I examine the judgements not as texts that contain particular discourses, like in the previous chapters, but instead as *archives of evidence* as to the ways in which value judgements about intimacies were inherent to the processes of implementation and service delivery – and as to the *intimate disruptions* that were engendered as a result.

⁹⁴ See the previous chapter for a more in-depth discussion of the ‘state effect’ that creates the notion of the coherent, bounded state.

⁹⁵ For more detailed discussions of the ways in which the preferences and actions of street-level bureaucrats can influence policy implementation, see Cooper (2017), Newman (2012, 2013, 2014), and Wright (2002).

Conclusion

Overall, this thesis attempts – to use Berlant’s language – to move ‘away from the domain of the politics of sexual difference’ (1997: 58). It foregrounds the centrality of sexuality and intimacy to the regulatory and discursive processes of austerity – whichever subjects those processes may pertain to. It makes this move in a number of different ways and in a range of different sites, in order to highlight a wide array of examples or case studies that all – albeit rather differently – illustrate the significance of sexuality and intimacy to the functioning of austerity politics in the UK. Throughout this chapter I have made two central arguments: firstly, that there is more to sexuality and intimacy than sexual identities and subject positions, and that the non-identitarian and non-subject specific ways in which sexuality operates matter greatly to and in its relationship(s) to economic, political, and cultural formations – such as austerity. Secondly, I have argued that sexuality is always co-constituted with other social categories of difference in such a way that any analysis of sexuality in relation to a particular social, political, or cultural formation is incomplete without concomitant attention to the interdependent relationships between processes of sexualisation, racialisation, gendering, and classing, for instance.

In this chapter I have unpacked what I mean by this thesis’ titular term ‘sexual and intimate life’, by introducing, firstly, the key conceptual and epistemological interventions that the rest of this thesis makes and, secondly, the methods it deploys to make them. I began with a brief section that explored the overall approach this thesis takes, highlighting the theoretical and epistemological foundations both for engaging in a non-identitarian analysis of sexuality, generally, and for investigating sexual regulation, more specifically. I then focused on my conceptualisation of sexuality and intimacy through the frameworks of sexual subjectivities, sexual inequality, and intimate disruptions, while also introducing the methods that reflect and stem from each conceptualisation – figuration, policy-as-discourse analysis, and analysis of processes of policy implementation and service delivery. All three conceptualisations are

intended to respond to the central question this thesis asks – what kinds of sexual and intimate lives, subjects, and politics are made (im)possible, (il)legible, or (il)legitimate through and within austerity politics in the UK – which I now turn to answering in more detail.

Tackling Cultural Poverty:

Sexual Inequalities in Austerity Discourse

Chapter 3

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Introduction

The *Child Poverty Act 2010* received royal assent in March 2010, just two months before the 2010 General Election and the subsequent formation of the Coalition Government between the Conservative and Liberal Democratic Parties. Labour’s flagship policy in the area of child poverty, the Act followed the Labour Government’s 2008 announcement, endeavouring to enshrine in legislation the target of eradicating child poverty in the UK by 2020, and was passed with cross-party support. The Act established four separate child poverty targets related to relative, absolute, and ‘persistent’ poverty, based on household income statistics, to be met by 2020⁹⁶ – as well as required the UK government to publish a regular child poverty strategy and annual

⁹⁶ These targets were to ‘reduce the proportion of children who live in relative low income (in families with income below 60 per cent of the median) to less than 10 per cent’; ‘to reduce the proportion of children who live in material deprivation and have a low income to less than 5 per cent’; ‘to reduce the proportion of children that experience long periods of relative poverty, with the specific target to be set at a later date’; and ‘to reduce the proportion of children who live below an income threshold fixed in real terms to less than 5 per cent’ (Kennedy 2014: 5).

progress reports, and initiated the setting up of the Child Poverty Commission to independently monitor governmental progress in reducing child poverty.

However, a lot has happened in child poverty policy since 2010. Apart from the publication of the 2011 and 2014 child poverty strategies, in 2012 the Government consulted on ‘better measures of child poverty’ (CPU 2012), and in July 2015 in the House of Commons the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith announced the Government’s intention to change the way that child poverty is measured and tracked in the UK (HC Deb 2015: cols 1504-1506). The plan was to replace the child poverty targets based on relative and absolute poverty indicators set in the 2010 Act, with a new statutory duty to report on indicators of ‘worklessness’ and ‘educational attainment’ instead. The Government’s effort partially failed, as the House of Lords pushed for the legislation to include a requirement to continue publishing the relative and absolute poverty statistics. However, while the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 subsequently passed with this reporting requirement, these statistics are no longer tied to any official poverty reduction targets. Further, the government is no longer required to publish a child poverty strategy and, perhaps unsurprisingly, no government has published one since. The cross-departmental Child Poverty Unit (CPU) – originally established in 1999 to work on meeting Labour’s child poverty reduction targets – was also scrapped (HC Deb 2016g: c1322).⁹⁷ Most recently in 2017, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published a policy paper titled *Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families* – ‘the first in a series of initiatives aimed at tackling the problems that prevent families from getting on in life’ (DWP 2017b).

The austerity era has, thus, seen multiple shifts and changes in the way that child poverty has been managed and tackled by the successive Conservative-led Governments – as well as, importantly, in the way that it has been defined and talked about. Both the Coalition Government and the

⁹⁷ The Unit’s staff had already previously been cut to less than half – from 24 in 2012-13 to 11 in 2016 (Kingman 2017).

post-2015 Conservative Government(s) have attempted to shift the definition of, or indicators for, (child) poverty, in a way that orients poverty discourse more and more towards *cultural* factors and away from material or economic ones. This chapter examines these recent attempts through a reading of three key policy texts and makes two central arguments – firstly, that these attempts indicate a significant drive to *culturalise* poverty, and, secondly, that this culturalisation depends on, and is underpinned by, certain discursive deployments of sexuality and gender. These deployments position the family as the location in which ‘cultures of poverty’ are reproduced and, consequently, also as the proper site for government action to interrupt the cycle of reproduction. Familial gender dynamics, reproductive arrangements, and parenting practices are, in turn, in significant ways highlighted as key aspects of the discursive framing of poverty in the austerity context. I begin this chapter with a section that introduces and further contextualises the three policy texts that it examines, as well as briefly discusses the method – policy-as-discourse analysis – it employs. This is followed by four sections that each focus on examining a particular aspect of the poverty discourses advanced in the three texts, from the increasing emphasis on ‘worklessness’ to the focus on ‘troubled families.’ In the final, discussion section of the chapter, I explore some of the cultural and political consequences of the culturalisation and familialisation of poverty – firstly, to citizenship regimes and secondly, to class analysis and discourse.

Framing Cultural Poverty: Method and Materials

The three policy texts examined in this chapter are the Coalition Government’s first child poverty strategy, published in 2011 to fulfil the statutory requirement set in the Child Poverty Act 2010, titled *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families’ Lives* (DfE 2011); the 2012 consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty: A Consultation on Better Measures of Child Poverty* (CPU 2012); and the Conservative Government’s 2017 policy paper

Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families (DWP 2017a).⁹⁸ In order to more comprehensively cover some of the discursive shifts that are not explicitly expressed in the policy documents themselves, at times this chapter additionally refers to Duncan Smith's announcement and the subsequent discussion of the proposed changes to the child poverty indicators in the House of Commons in July 2015 (HC Deb 2015: cols 1504-1519).⁹⁹ The Coalition's *Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17* (DfE 2014) has not been chosen as one of the texts to be examined in this chapter, since the 2012 consultation document and the 2015 parliamentary discussion better capture the discursive and policy changes that took place between the publication of the 2011 strategy and the post-Coalition child poverty policy landscape.

The policy documents this chapter investigates all faced significant criticism at the time of publication and/or announcement, particularly from charities working and campaigning on the issue of child poverty¹⁰⁰ – suggesting that the changes indicated by the documents' framings of poverty were, indeed, viewed by many as a *worsening* of the policy landscape overall. The documents not only altogether reflect the significant degree to which poverty discourse has been culturalised in the UK in the austerity era, but they also capture some of the changes that have taken place in this regard *between* 2011 and 2017. Each document, firstly, introduces the government's approach to tackling child poverty, usually framed around addressing 'the root causes of poverty and not just the symptoms' (DfE 2011: 8). Secondly, various specific aspects of the approach are discussed, including, but not limited to, issues such as work and worklessness, family stability, and parenting.

⁹⁸ I also explore the culturalisation of poverty specifically in relation to the 2017 document in Lehtonen (2018).

⁹⁹ Duncan Smith's announcement was immediately preceded by a statement by the Secretary of State for Transport, Patrick McLoughlin, regarding the final report of the Davies Commission on airport expansion in the UK, which was immediately criticised as a deliberate tactic to divert attention away from the announcement of the proposed child poverty measures. See comment made by MP Stephen Timms in the parliamentary discussion (HC Deb 2015: c1507), as well as comments by MPs Debbie Abrahams, David Winnick, Sue Hayman, Jeremy Corbyn, and Luciana Berger for further criticisms (*ibid.*: cols 1510-1519).

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Richardson (2011) and Butler (2016b).

Each document also includes a list of (potential) indicators for measuring and tracking child poverty in the UK – although they are in a more central role in the consultation document. The 2011 document presents the most comprehensive and broad-ranging list of suggested indicators, whereas the much shorter set of indicators proposed by Duncan Smith (HC Deb 2015: c1505) in 2015 broadly reflect the ones consulted on in 2012 – except for the relative and absolute income indicators, which were included in 2012 but scrapped in 2015. The 2015 proposal included the new statutory duty to monitor and report on the number of children living in ‘workless households’ and ‘long-term workless households’, as well as on the educational attainment of all children and ‘disadvantaged children’ at the end of Key Stage 4. A range of other non-statutory indicators ‘to measure the progress against the root causes of poverty’ (*ibid.*: c1505) was also introduced. Finally, the indicators proposed in the 2017 document are, again, not dissimilar to those presented in the earlier documents, except that this time they are positioned as aiming ‘to track progress in tackling the disadvantages that affect families’ and children’s outcomes’ (DWP 2017a: 22) – rather than aiming specifically to address *poverty*.

Overall these three documents, as I argue throughout this chapter, signal a significant shift within poverty discourse in the UK – away from monitoring and addressing the material and economic conditions in which poor families and children live, and towards tracking, managing, and intervening in a range of *behaviours, practices, and cultures* that, supposedly, make up the root causes of poverty. Poverty, and particularly child poverty, provides one key discursive battleground in which not just policy discourses but also the ideological and political preferences of governments are constructed, reinforced, and contested. This chapter utilises policy-as-discourse analysis to unpack and examine the construction of (child) poverty discourse throughout the austerity era, focusing on four different aspects of poverty discourse reflected in all three documents – albeit to different degrees: worklessness; family stability and parenting; cycles of poverty and disadvantage; and the notion of ‘troubled families.’ My analysis illustrates the degree to which (child) poverty is problematised (Bacchi

2000) as a cultural issue in austerity discourse – as well as suggests that the culturalisation of poverty increases progressively over the course of the three documents. Further, this problematisation depends on the deployment of various commonsensical notions about sexuality and gender, including assumptions and value judgements about caring work, familial gender dynamics, reproductive arrangements, and parenting practices.

As well as unpacking the commonsensical assumptions about sexuality and gender embedded in the policy texts, my aim overall is to investigate the *political narratives* contained in the documents and to direct attention to the kind of social (and sexual) world these narratives seek to bring into being. As the previous chapter suggested, the political nature of policies tends to be discursively displaced ‘by the objective, neutral, legal-rational idioms in which they are portrayed’ (Shore and Wright 1997: 7). My aim is, thus, to represent the policy documents as political and ideological devices – or, in other words, as ‘instrument[s] of power’ (*ibid.*: 4). I am, therefore, also interested in the *political and cultural consequences* of the discursive shifts my analysis highlights. One key such consequence is the way in which particular sexual inequalities are maintained – and, at the same time, disguised – by the problematisation of poverty as cultural. The designation of sexuality to the cultural sphere, thus, helps mask the interrelatedness of socio-economic or class inequality to regimes of sexual inequality, and as I argue in the final section of this chapter, these regulatory and discursive processes also have significant consequences for the scope and nature of class analysis.

Worklessness

Work, not welfare, is the best route out of poverty for those who are able to work. (DfE 2011: 2)

Work, and an income, is the surest and most sustainable route out of poverty. (CPU 2012: 3)

I believe work is the best route out of poverty. (Duncan Smith in HC Deb 2015: c1505)

Work is the best route out of poverty. (DWP 2017a: 8)

As the above quotes indicate, there are striking similarities in all the documents, particularly in relation to the role of work in combatting (child) poverty. Despite these similarities, however, each document presents its proposed approach as *new*. The 2011 strategy sets out ‘a new approach to tackling poverty and securing social justice in this Parliament and the decade ahead’ (DfE 2011: 2). A new measure of child poverty is needed in 2012 because ‘it cannot be right that experiences so vital to childhood, like seeing a parent go out to work or growing up in a stable family, are not reflected in our understanding of child poverty’ (CPU 2012: 1), and in 2017, ‘a new approach to tackling poverty and engrained disadvantage’ needs to be developed in order to realise the Government’s vision of a ‘fairer Britain where success is based on merit, not privilege, and where everyone has the chance to go as far as their talents and hard work will take them’ (DWP 2017a: 3). In the earlier documents, the need for a new approach is justified with reference to the failings of the previous Governments: ‘we seek to learn the lessons of the previous decade, where prosperity bypassed the worst-off and welfare dependency took root across the country’ (DfE 2011: 2) – thus reflecting the common framing in austerity discourse more generally of the previous Labour Government(s) as responsible for a whole host of social and economic ills, as discussed in Chapter 1. In 2017 it is needed because, while the Government has already taken many steps towards creating a ‘fairer Britain’ or a ‘fairer society’ (DWP 2017a: 3, 7, 14, 21), this vision cannot be fully realised as long as some families remain stuck in a ‘cycle of disadvantage’ (*ibid.*: 8).

The political and societal context that the documents intervene in is, thus, described as a work in progress, a kind of society-in-the-making. Whereas the previous Labour Government ‘entrenched benefit dependency’ (DfE 2011: 2), the Coalition Government is committed to addressing ‘the root causes of poverty’ (*ibid.*: 3; CPU 2012: 1) that are about ‘far more than income’ (DfE 2011: 3). In 2017 this process is already underway: ‘we have started to rebalance our society in favour of ordinary working people, but now need to do more to turn Britain into a Great Meritocracy’ (DWP 2017a: 3). In all three documents ‘worklessness’ is presented as a key ‘root cause’ of

poverty and, consequently, as a key target of government intervention. In the first instance, then, these framings signal a discursive shift from ‘unemployment’ to ‘worklessness’ – the latter a much broader category that includes not only unemployed people, but also ‘economically inactive’ populations, such as people with disabilities or sicknesses that prevent them from working, full-time carers, students, and, in some cases, also pensioners. Work – and importantly, specifically *paid* work – is, thus, seen as the best route out of poverty – in contrast to various other kinds of labour that are here excluded from definitions of ‘work.’

As well as a problem in its own right, worklessness is presented in the three documents as a potential factor behind a whole host of other issues. In the consultation document (CPU 2012), worklessness is the first potential measure discussed, but it is also referred to in relation to *all* of the other measures. For example, unmanageable debt, living in poor housing or a ‘troubled area’ (*ibid.*: 1), and parental ill health can all lead to worklessness. Similarly, the 2017 document presents poor health, homelessness, low qualifications, and ‘other barriers and disadvantages’ as both ‘causes and effects of worklessness’ (DWP 2017a: 9). Each separate section on these various other disadvantages highlights their connection to worklessness as a central issue: for example, in relation to ‘Poor parental mental health’, the paper states that ‘there is strong evidence that a person’s employment status directly impacts their psychological wellbeing’ (*ibid.*: 10). In presenting evidence for the link – and suggesting a causal one – between these ‘disadvantages’ and being in paid employment, these ostensibly separate measures are transformed into further arguments for the importance of work and against the ills of worklessness. Moreover, the possibility that these other issues and disadvantages may, in fact, be as (or even more) clearly connected to material poverty as they are to worklessness is not considered. Nor is the influence of other factors, such as stigma, shame, or stress in the case of the mental wellbeing of unemployed or poor individuals.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ See Valentine and Harris (2014), Jo (2016), and Main and Bradshaw (2016) on the influence of stigma, shame, and stress, respectively.

In contrasting ‘worklessness’ – not unemployment – with employment, a tidy dichotomy is created between the two, suggestive of a society neatly divided into those who work and those who do not, regardless of the reason. As Nick Bailey suggests, this dichotomising ignores and masks ‘the high levels of movement between categories and the high level of benefits flowing to those in work without any apparent moral decline’ (2016: 83). Moreover, since ‘worklessness’ encompasses a larger share of the population than ‘unemployment’, it has tended to be associated with a normative aim – the commodification of marginalised groups previously not considered in urgent need of labour market ‘activation’, such as people with disabilities and lone parents.¹⁰² For instance in the 2011 document a specific emphasis is placed on ‘moving lone parents into work’ (DfE 2011: 28), and the lowering of the threshold age at which lone parents are expected to look for paid work is highlighted as a key positive development.¹⁰³ However, at the same time the normative aim to ‘activate’ lone parents in the labour market, reflected in all three documents, is part of a longer development in the UK, whereby lone parents are increasingly treated as workers rather than as mothers – or fathers – in social policy, as Damian Grimshaw and Jill Rubery (2012; cf. Smith 2013) discuss.¹⁰⁴

Jane Lewis (2001) argues that policies intended to incentivise lone parents – usually women – to find paid work are reflective of a governmental aim to intervene in the number of workless *households*, rather than about raising women’s employment as such. The 2011 document at least partially confirms this focus, as it states that ‘having *one or both parents* in work can contribute to eroding intergenerational cycles of poverty’ (DfE 2011: 24, emphasis mine). Further, as Lewis (2001) highlights, they tend to be partially justified with reference to the higher employment rates of married mothers, but without taking into account the tendency for

¹⁰² For further discussions of these normative aims associated with ‘worklessness’ discourse, see Connor (2010), Millar and Ridge (2013), Pantazis (2016), and Wiggan (2012).

¹⁰³ Since 2012 lone parents have had to register for Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) when their youngest child reaches the age of five – up from seven in 2008, and 16 until then.

¹⁰⁴ See Connor (2010), Garthwaite (2011), Gedalof (2017), and Watson and Philo (2013) on the increasing commodification of people with disabilities and their inclusion under the rubric of ‘worklessness.’

married women to work short part-time hours, while continuing to partially rely on the incomes of their breadwinner partners. The policy climate surrounding married mothers whose partners work is overall much more ambivalent than that pertaining to lone parents, as I suggested in Chapter 1. While policies such as the ‘free’ childcare offered to families where *both* parents work (discussed below) suggest a governmental preference for married mothers to also find paid work, others, for instance recent tax increases, encourage second earners – also usually women – to stay at home. Such policies not only assume the male breadwinner/female carer binary, but as Grimshaw and Rubery (2012) point out, they also fail to understand that today’s married women may be tomorrow’s lone mothers, thus also reducing the potential *future* labour market participation of lone parents.

As another example of a policy that assumes the traditional family model – with a (male) breadwinner at the helm – Universal Credit is touted in all three documents as key to making sure that ‘work pays’ (CPU 2012: 13; DWP 2017a: 15) and to enabling families in which one adult is in full-time employment ‘to have an income that lifts them out of poverty’ (DfE 2011: 24). The new combined benefit, however, makes welfare payments payable to the head of the household and, thus, in effect naturalises women’s disadvantaged labour market position – as well as may lead to *increased* child poverty and disadvantage. Further, racialised and minority ethnic women are likely to be even more affected by the way in which Universal Credit is structured.¹⁰⁵ Altogether, then, the framings of the three documents reflect the overall discursive landscape of austerity discussed in Chapter 1, whereby lone mothers and married mothers face a highly divergent policy landscape. Rather than necessarily reflecting an explicit aim to *traditionalise* families, however, traditional models of marriage and family are here *drawn upon* to withdraw support for dual earner households – thus incentivising married mothers not to work – while the emphasis on paid work as a panacea to poverty and a whole host of other disadvantages

¹⁰⁵ For further discussions of Universal Credit, see Grimshaw and Rubery (2012), MacLeavy (2011), Main and Bradshaw (2016), and Rubery and Rafferty (2014); on the impact specifically on racialised and ethnic minority women, see Sandhu and Stevenson (2015).

is reinforced in the case of lone parents, as Jill Rubery and Anthony Rafferty (2014) argue.

The 2011 document includes a concession that ‘groups such as lone parents and large families may face particular issues with childcare responsibilities which can make entering work seem particularly challenging’ (DfE 2011: 18). The paper’s suggested solution to these ‘particular issues’ is to ‘create a culture in which it is easier for parents to combine paid work and family life. This includes access to family friendly employment as well as affordable, quality early education and childcare’ (*ibid.*: 31). ‘An extra £300 million into childcare’ (CPU 2012: 13) is promised in the 2012 document, and similarly in 2017, the Government’s investment in free childcare is highlighted, including a specific mention of the ‘extended entitlement to free childcare of up to 30 hours’ (DWP 2017a: 15) for three and four-year-olds.¹⁰⁶ However, the scheme has already faced significant criticism, led to nursery closures across the country, as well as resulted in some parents actually paying *more* than before under the new scheme of ‘free’ childcare.¹⁰⁷ Further, only families where both parents – or the sole parent, in case of lone parent families – work are eligible. Thus, while lone parents are strongly encouraged to find paid work, very little is offered in the documents to make it feasible in practice – echoing Rubery and Rafferty’s argument that ‘an expectation of paid work is not matched by a right to care’ (2014: 137) in the austerity context. Instead, the policy frameworks tend to impose a significant double burden on lone parents, as they continue to be responsible for significant amounts of childcare, while also being required to look for paid work.

As Chapter 1 highlighted, despite the significant shifts in women’s labour market participation in recent decades, patterns of unpaid work have not changed very much. As well as functioning as an expansion of the

¹⁰⁶ Extended from fifteen hours per week from September 2017 onwards.

¹⁰⁷ Contrary to the way in which the scheme worked earlier, nurseries that sign up to the scheme are no longer able to make up the shortfall between government funding and the actual cost of childcare by charging parents more. Consequently, many nurseries have closed and some have opted out altogether because they cannot afford to offer the free places, whereas others have started charging parents new, additional, charges in order to make up the shortfall. For more information, see Ferguson (2017) and Turner (2017).

category ‘unemployed’, the focus on ‘worklessness’ sustained in all three documents also works to mask the significant amounts of care work done by many of those now considered within the rubric of ‘worklessness.’¹⁰⁸ In the documents a greater emphasis is, therefore, placed on encouraging precisely the groups of people who tend to carry a disproportionate share of care and housework responsibilities to find paid work, thus bringing into question their designation as ‘workless’ in the first place. At the same time the disproportionate allocation of unpaid labour itself is not in any way addressed – thus reinforcing the long-standing assumption that women are available as informal carers. Further, whether it is, indeed, desirable to attempt to coax carers and others who do significant amounts of unpaid labour into paid employment instead, is a question clearly out of the remit of the documents. Overall then, the separation of caring work and other unpaid labour from paid labour – with only the latter conceptualised as ‘work’ – relies on the public/private divide understood in heteronormative terms. This reliance leads to not only the various other kinds of labour, but also the ways in which the public and the private sphere depend on each other, being hidden. Thus, existing gender dynamics tend to be naturalised rather than challenged in the documents’ discursive framings.

Contrary to the 2011 and 2012 documents, which explicitly address poverty and, consequently, set out to change the child *poverty* indicators, the indicators proposed in the 2017 policy paper are meant to ‘to track progress in tackling the *disadvantages* that affect families’ and children’s lives’ (DWP 2017a: 5, emphasis mine). Material or economic poverty is, in fact, only fleetingly referenced in the paper, and only in terms of its direct relationship to work and worklessness – signalling the most significant discursive shift *between* the three documents. The documents’ framings (or lack thereof) of *in-work* poverty are a case in point: in the 2011 document in-work poverty is discussed explicitly, and it even includes a proposed indicator for ‘the proportion of children who are in families where at least one person works yet still remain in relative low income’ (DfE 2011: 34). In the 2012

¹⁰⁸ For instance a study conducted by MacDonald and his colleagues (2014b) found that the long-term unemployed people interviewed tended to engage in substantial amounts of care and voluntary work.

document it is suggested instead that ‘income from benefits does not have the same effect as income from work’ (CPU 2012: 20), and in the parliamentary discussion following the 2015 announcement, Duncan Smith responded to the repeated questions about in-work poverty by simply stating that it rose under the previous Government (HC Deb 2015: c1508, c1514). Despite these discursive differences, however, none of the documents suggest anything other than *more work*, or the euphemistic ‘making work pay’, as solutions to the increasing rates of in-work poverty in the UK – suggestions that have been questioned and refuted by many (Bailey 2016; Jensen 2012; Main and Bradshaw 2016).¹⁰⁹

The discursive focus of the 2017 document is different from that of the earlier documents – shifted not just away from in-work poverty, but also away from poverty *altogether*. Generally, the paper uses the term ‘disadvantage’, with material or economic poverty appearing as a kind of afterthought – a negative consequence that occurs in the UK – the to-be ‘Great Meritocracy’ (DWP 2017a: 3) – because individuals are unable to *overcome their worklessness* and ‘take advantage of the opportunities in a fairer Britain’ (*ibid.*: 3). Despite the paper’s stated aim of developing ‘a new approach to tackling *poverty* and engrained disadvantage’ (*ibid.*: 3, emphasis mine), poverty appears to not quite warrant attention in its own right. This shift in discursive framing works not only to move the focus away from material or economic poverty overall, but also to individualise poverty – thus reflecting the general shift towards the individualisation of poverty discourses in recent years.¹¹⁰ This individualising emphasis, in turn, functions to discursively delink both worklessness and poverty from economic demand and the availability of job opportunities, as both John Clarke and Janet Newman (2012) and Jay Wiggan (2012) argue, and, further, helps maintain ‘the myths of full employment’ (Jensen 2012: 5). Rather than

¹⁰⁹ Out of the 14 million people who live in poverty in the UK, eight million live in families where at least one person is in work (JRF 2017).

¹¹⁰ On the increasing individualisation of poverty in the austerity context, see Connor (2010), Jensen (2012), Main and Bradshaw (2016), Valentine and Harris (2014), and Wiggan (2012).

on *structural* conditions, the focus here is squarely on the *behaviour* of ‘workless’ people.

Overall, the documents’ discursive framings, thus, sustain a focus on ‘worklessness’ over unemployment, with the effect of both individualising poverty discourse and moving it further away from structural issues such as labour market conditions – and even more so in the 2017 document where poverty drops out of the frame almost entirely. Social welfare is presented as a key *cause* of poverty, and work – or *more* work – consequently, as the main solution to addressing poverty. Further, in emphasising *paid* work above everything else, the documents’ framings of ‘worklessness’ tend to function to naturalise existing – unequal – gender dynamics, rather than to change them. In particular, lone parents – as well as other groups such as people with disabilities – are positioned as in urgent need of labour market activation, but without much practical support to enable them to do so. Since the focus is on workless *households* rather than workless individuals, married mothers are positioned differently to lone mothers – with the family appearing as the focal point of the documents’ overall framings.

Family Stability and Parenting

Effective parenting is critical to enabling children to flourish. (DfE 2011: 8)

We believe children who grow up in strong, stable families with quality relationships in the home stand the best chance of a positive future. (*ibid.*: 36)

There is a relationship between experiencing family breakdown as a child and poor outcomes as an adult. (CPU 2012: 42)

Parental conflict [--] directly impacts on children’s wellbeing as well as the adults’ parenting practices. (DWP 2017a: 19)

The family is clearly positioned as the key site of the arguments put forward in all three documents – sometimes from their subtitles onwards: ‘Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families’ Lives’ (DfE 2011) and ‘Helping Workless Families’ (DWP 2017a). The family is where the problems associated with worklessness and ‘disadvantage’ originate and are reproduced, as well as where the proposed governmental interventions to

tackle these issues are centred. However, as I argue in this section, the family is not just presented as the *location* where these processes take place, but its internal dynamics, arrangements, and practices are, furthermore, centred as the focal point of the problems the documents' proposals aim to tackle. Poor parenting and 'family instability' are viewed as key factors behind children's poor development and future prospects – and, consequently, as root causes of child poverty – but at the same time the document's framings also sustain a focus on *family form*. Overall, the documents' narratives of parenting continue the *individualising* emphasis examined in the previous section – this time on parental and familial *practices, arrangements, and norms* – instead of focusing on economic or material living conditions.

Firstly, then, parenting and especially the *quality of parenting* are central to all three papers' framings. A desire 'to see a culture where the key aspects of good parenting are widely understood' (DfE 2011: 38) is expressed in the 2011 document, and the difficulty of measuring 'parenting style and skill' (CPU 2012: 17) discussed in the 2012 document. In the latest paper the focus is more on the impact of parental conflict on parenting ability, as 'conflict is likely to drain the emotional resources required to parent adequately, putting children at greater risk of emotional and social problems (DWP 2017a: 10). A curiously circular argument is created in the paper, whereby worklessness is presented as a potential cause of 'relationship distress', which is, in turn, presented as a factor leading to parental separation – which can, again, lead to worklessness. The solutions suggested in the paper for breaking this cycle are limited to supporting parents in resolving the conflict and, unsurprisingly, in finding work. Nonetheless, 'good', 'strong', or 'effective' parenting is highlighted as key in all three documents, thus linking parenting *practices and behaviour* to children's emotional, behavioural, cognitive and social development.¹¹¹ The

¹¹¹ This emphasis stands in stark contrast to the available evidence: Main and Bradshaw's (2016) study found no significant differences between the parenting practices of poor and non-poor parents and, further, instead found strong evidence suggesting that when resources are limited, parents are likely to prioritise their children's needs over their own. Dermott and Pomati (2016), similarly, found no evidence to support the idea that the parenting practices or financial decision making of lone parents and coupled parents differ

responsibility for what happens to children later on in life is here placed squarely on the shoulders of parents, instead of considering the impact of schooling, the wider social environment, or again that of material poverty.

More specifically, parenting styles combining elements of discipline and rule setting with ‘warmth and sensitivity’ (DfE 2011: 37) are seen as constituting ‘good’ parenting in the 2011 document, which goes on to quote the Frank Field report. Val Gillies’s (2012) discussion of the report suggests that its focus is on the (supposed) societal decline in parental responsibility and personal values. Here the parenting practices of poor parents are problematised by linking them to notions of *national* or *societal* moral crisis – echoing David Cameron’s (2011) ‘broken Britain’ rhetoric, discussed in more detail below. In the 2011 document, such ‘abstract notions of parental [--] “warmth”’ (Jensen 2012: 1) are, further, combined with ‘parenting science’ (Gillies 2012: 101). It also quotes the Graham Allen report, which, as Rosalind Edwards and Val Gillies (2012) discuss, argues that children can develop faulty ‘brain architecture’ due to bad parenting. Similarly, in the 2017 document ‘exposure to parental conflict’ is presented as potentially having ‘long-term negative impacts on children’s early emotional, behavioural, *cognitive* and social development’ (DWP 2017a: 10, emphasis mine). The documents’ inclusion of harm to children’s *cognitive* development as one of the potential consequences of parental conflict or bad parenting echoes the recent trend of turning to brain science for evidence in social policy more widely, and in arguing for the importance of early intervention policies in particular. As Edwards and her colleagues highlight, the notion that children’s cognitive and neurological development is intrinsically linked to the kind of parenting they receive, especially during a supposed ‘crucial ante- and post-natal window of “1001 days”’ (2015: 171) functions as a useful trope to push policy into a particular direction, rather than necessarily reflecting scientific evidence for such a link.

Altogether the documents’ framings of parenting, thus, reflect the increasing attribution of the ability of children to do well later to the *style* of

significantly, thus questioning the entire basis for policy that treats lone parents as a separate group requiring specific policy attention.

parenting, or ‘the minutiae of parenting practice’ (Gillies 2012: 105), over all other factors.¹¹² Overall, poor parents find themselves not only more vulnerable to austerity – as discussed in Chapter 1 – but also, at the same time, ‘more accountable than ever for the social (im)mobility of themselves and their children’ (Jensen and Tyler 2012). In sustaining the individualising emphasis of (child) poverty discourses in general, this increasing ‘parental determinism’ (Gillies 2012: 90) in policy-making also diverts attention away from material poverty, as well as the – material and other – resources needed to parent ‘well.’

Apart from the central focus on parenting itself, however, a wide range of other parental behaviours and practices is included in each paper’s discussion – as the quotes included at the beginning of this section indicate. The third chapter of the 2011 document is titled ‘Supporting Family Life and Children’s Life Chances’ (DfE 2011: 35). It argues that ‘relationship quality’ is key to children’s wellbeing, whereas ‘intense conflict between parents – whatever their relationship status – has been shown to be detrimental for children’s outcomes’ (*ibid.*: 36). The 2012 document frames its intervention around ‘family stability’ instead, which is rather tautologically defined as ‘grow[ing] up in a stable family environment without experiencing relationship breakdown’ (CPU 2012: 40). The section examines the impact that lone parenthood, growing up in a step family, and domestic violence can have on children. The 2017 document includes a section on ‘parental conflict’ (DWP 2017a: 9), in which – despite its name – broad connections are made between parental conflict, parental separation, worklessness, and cycles of disadvantage. Similarly to the earlier papers, the 2017 paper argues that ‘children growing up with parents who have good-quality relationships (whether they are together or separated), tend to enjoy a wider range of better future outcomes’ (*ibid.*: 9), be it in terms of mental or physical health, or educational attainment. Thus, in all three documents the commonsensical view that a *stable* home environment is key to raising successful children is promoted – but exactly what such an environment

¹¹² On this discursive shift, see also Allen and Taylor (2012), Edwards and Gillies (2012), Jensen (2012), Jensen and Tyler (2012), and Smith (2013).

looks like is never quite explicitly defined.¹¹³ Since each document includes such a wide range of issues in its discussion, however, it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that parental separation or divorce is *in itself* bad for children.

While the 2011 and 2017 papers go to great lengths to assure the reader that ‘relationship quality’ is more important than whether parents stay together, there is, nonetheless, a strong focus on two-parent families – or at least a strong preference for parenting to be undertaken by two parents. The 2017 document includes a discussion of the ‘benefits to having a good-quality relationship between the child and the non-resident parent (most commonly the father) for children’ (DWP 2017a: 10), as well as a further specification that ‘we understand the importance of both mothers and fathers to children’s future outcomes’ (*ibid.*: 20). The 2012 paper also includes a consultation question specifically about the role of fathers: ‘how important is the presence of a father to a child’s experience of poverty and life chances?’ (CPU 2012: 42). Since this seemingly open-ended question is preceded by a number of quotes and statistics about the poor outcomes associated with lone parent families, this question can easily lead the reader towards the conclusion that families without fathers are in themselves *undesirable*. The emphasis in both documents on the importance of *fathering* – rather than on the (at least ostensibly) gender-neutral *parenting* – thus supports the ‘absent father’ narrative, whereby a ‘singular father figure [is] positioned as essential for authority and stability’ (De Benedictis 2012: 13).¹¹⁴ Further, it highlights single parenting in general, and single mothering in particular, as undesirable parenting arrangements, thus confirming Esther Dermott and Marco Pomati’s (2016) argument that lone parent families tend to be seen as *deficient* in the current policy climate.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ In his 2015 announcement, Duncan Smith proudly asserts that ‘family life has stabilised’ (HC Deb 2015: c1512) since the Conservatives came to power but, similarly, offers no explanation as to what this stabilisation has entailed.

¹¹⁴ This emphasis also stands in contradiction to the implications of certain austerity policies on intimate lives, as I discuss in relation to the Bedroom Tax in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁵ On stigmatising discourses of lone mothers in the austerity context, see also Allen and Taylor (2012), De Benedictis (2012), Dermott and Pomati (2016), Jensen (2014), and Millar and Ridge (2013).

These discursive emphases are reproduced in the two case studies included in the 2012 document's 'family stability' section. The first case study is about Jane, described as 'a lone parent living in a deprived area with her five young children' (CPU 2012: 41). She has been struggling financially and feels 'forced into debt' since her relationship with the father of her children ended. It is mentioned that Jane's ex-partner 'has not provided any practical support or paid her any child maintenance' (*ibid.*: 41), but for instance state help in enforcing child maintenance payments or providing free childcare are not explored as potential solutions. Instead, the individualising presentation of Jane's situation can easily lead the reader to the conclusion that her problems would not exist – had she simply chosen not to separate with her partner. Here, the lone parent is 'positioned as failing to give her children a stable father figure by selfishly placing her will to parent alone [--] above them' (2012: 13), as Sara De Benedictis argues in her examination of parenting discourses in the context of austerity politics.

The second case study, similarly, reproduces a highly individualising view of relationship issues. It is about Robert, who was 'kicked out of home' (CPU 2012: 42) at 16 and is quoted saying:

Basically, my mum had a boyfriend... I think this happens a lot: mum has a boyfriend, boyfriend and her son don't get on, end up rowing. We got into blows one day. I've got little sisters and it wasn't nice for them to see that. So, I left... I was on my own, I was so lonely. I squatted for a while, then lived in a hostel. (*ibid.*: 42)

The subtext is, again, about the mother's poor choices – in this case her choice to be with an abusive boyfriend and, therefore, to implicitly prioritise her own relationship over her children's wellbeing. Specific cases or scenarios are not included in the 2011 and 2017 documents, but their discussions, nonetheless, reproduce the 2012 document's focus on the importance of *avoiding* relationship breakdown. In coupling examples of violent or absent *fathers* with a strong emphasis on the ills of relationship conflict and breakdown, the focus is centrally on *mothers* as responsible for their children's poor development and outcomes – and particularly on lone mothers for risking *destabilising* the environment in which they raise their children.

Although in the 2011 document it is stated that ‘exactly how strong the correlation is, and how far there is a causal relationship between family type and child outcomes is the subject of much academic debate’, it is, nonetheless, also suggested that ‘what is clear is that experiencing *multiple relationship transitions* can be particularly damaging to children’ (DfE 2011: 36-7, emphasis mine). Since this statement follows the paper’s discussion of the many poor outcomes associated with children experiencing parental separation, conflict, or distress, the wording of ‘multiple relationship transitions’ seems to, specifically, point at single parents – usually mothers – who have different partners. This framing echoes Jean Carabine’s argument that the ‘moral hazard’ posed by lone mothers is ‘more often than not constituted as sexual’ (2001: 306) – in her case specifically in the context of social policy discourses. Her comparative examination of discourses of lone motherhood in the nineteenth century and the 1990s highlights that the stigmatisation of non-normative family forms, and particularly of families headed by lone mothers, has a long history in the UK. Pointing at the frequent discursive attacks on lone mothers in both eras, she argues that the implicit message in such attacks tends to be that ‘welfare benefits and housing should only be available to “respectable” married women’ (*ibid.*: 306).¹¹⁶ Whether lone mothers are having too many children, having them too early, or having children with multiple different fathers – and thus, implicitly, having sex with too many different men – lone mother discourses tend to reproduce assumptions about the *sexual* immorality and impropriety of the poor or working-class lone mother.¹¹⁷

While the sexual and reproductive decisions of single mothers are not explicitly discussed in the documents under analysis here, their framings, nonetheless, carry long-standing connotations of sexual morality and respectability. They position the mother who separates from her male partner, has more than one sexual partner, or simply *chooses* to parent alone, as depriving her children ‘of a “normal” upbringing through a lack of

¹¹⁶ On class and respectability politics, see the previous chapter’s discussion of Skeggs’s work.

¹¹⁷ See also Gedalof (2017) and Jensen and Tyler (2015) on discourses of sexual or reproductive ‘excess.’

the nuclear family' (De Benedictis 2012: 12). Echoes of the respectability politics discussed by Carabine are, thus, certainly evident in the documents under discussion here, reflected most clearly in the positioning of lone parent families at some distance from the *ideal* family type. The *flipside* of the documents' discussions of the ills of parental conflict, separation, and single parenting is, thus, the normative, heterosexual, two-parent family that embodies what is termed 'family stability' in the documents. The euphemistic references to 'family stability', coupled with the frequent references to the various *problems* associated with families that deviate from the norm, mean that heterosexual marriage comes to easily *stand in* for family stability, as Irene Gedalof (2017) suggests, such that the 'stable family' and the heterosexual nuclear family become readable as *interchangeable* – with other family forms and relationship types measured against this norm. The lone mother is here already *in advance* excluded from definitions of 'family stability', and her distance from this ideal, in turn, viewed as *proof* of the instability of the environment in which she raises her children. These discursive framings further disadvantage poor, working-class, and racialised mothers and families, due to the way in which they tend to be, similarly, perceived as *already* at a distance from normative notions of family life, as Edwards and Gillies (2012) note.

This section's discussion highlights the increasing 'familialisation of policy' (*ibid.*: 67) in general, as well as more specifically the centring of the poor family as the subject of intense judgement, discursive focus, and policy intervention in the area of child poverty. Poor parents are positioned as the key actors in preventing the future reproduction of the 'cycles of disadvantage' examined in the next section, and parenting – particularly conflict-free parenting – highlighted as the indispensable foundation for children's development, both cognitive and otherwise. Furthermore, however, all three papers also position what they view as 'good parenting' at some distance from single parenting and/or mothering, clearly marking two-parent families – or at least parenting by a mother and a father – as the preferred environment for raising children, whereas lone parent families and step-families appear deficient in comparison. *Family form* is, thus,

strongly associated with both parenting quality and child poverty – with the ‘stable’, heteronormative, two-parent family positioned as the ideal. As Dermott and Pomati argue, ‘current UK political discourse places the two-parent married family firmly centre stage’ (2016: 64) – both as a normative ideal and explicitly supported by policies. Overall, then, the family is here not only centred as the *location* in which poverty and worklessness can and should be tackled, but familial and sexual dynamics, arrangements, and practices are also highlighted as key to any such efforts.

Cycles of Dependency, Disadvantage, and Poverty

We want to break the *cycle of deprivation* too often passed from one generation to another. (DfE 2011: 4, emphasis mine)

There can be no doubt that child poverty has undermined the lives of *generation after generation of families* in the UK. (CPU 2012: 12, emphasis mine)

We want to focus on making a meaningful change to children’s lives by extending opportunity for all, so that both they and their children can escape from the *cycle of poverty*. (Duncan Smith in HC Deb 2015: c1506, emphasis mine)

Children in workless households are considerably more likely to repeat the poorer outcomes of their parents – an *intergenerational cycle of disadvantage*. (DWP 2017a: 8, emphasis mine)

As the previous two sections have established, the documents’ framings square in on the family as the focal point of governmental efforts to tackle poverty and disadvantage, while at the same time positioning them as secondary issues to worklessness. Worklessness can be reproduced in the family, both in itself, and through the reproduction of the various other disadvantages discussed in the documents, such as parental conflict, family instability, mental and physical ill health, substance abuse, low educational qualifications, and poor housing or homelessness. Since all of these other disadvantages are both causes and effects of worklessness, any efforts to tackle them are also framed as potential remedies to worklessness and *vice versa*. Breaking this ‘intergenerational cycle of disadvantage’ is the aim of the policy solutions suggested in the documents. However, it is particularly

by preventing the transmission of the *norm* of worklessness that the cycles of poverty can be tackled. Work is, therefore, important, and positioned as key to governmental efforts to tackle poverty, not just because of the *income* it brings to poor families, but also because of its *moral* value. Further, it is here, in the narratives about intergenerational cycles of poverty, deprivation, and disadvantage, that the poverty discourses advanced in the documents move most clearly into the *cultural* sphere.

As the quotes included above suggest, the argument that cycles of poverty, deprivation, or disadvantage can be passed on within families, from one generation to the next, is central in all three documents. Specifically, it is the overly generous welfare system, and the *cultures* of dependency and worklessness created and sustained by it, that keeps these cycles reproducing. The 2011 document claims that the previous Labour Government's 'approach has been exhausted, not only failing to turn the tide on income poverty, but worse still, exacerbating the problem by suppressing incentives to work and keeping families in cycles of entrenched deprivation' (DfE 2011: 4). While Labour threw 'money at the symptoms', the Coalition's strategic vision 'is focused on the powerful drivers which keep the most disadvantaged families stuck in cycles of poverty' (*ibid.*: 12). The 2012 consultation, similarly, wants to 'free families who have been trapped on benefits so they can live independently and see their lives transformed' (CPU 2012: 12). Here the poverty discourse advanced in the documents is reoriented towards the 'underlying problem' of welfare dependency, of which poverty is a *symptom* – a common trope in austerity discourse more generally.¹¹⁸ This discursive reorientation, in turn, reveals a paradox inherent to the documents' framings of poverty, as Christina Pantazis (2016) points out – on the one hand, poverty is presented as a consequence of the irresponsible behaviour of *individuals*, but on the other, it follows from the *structural* deficiencies of the welfare system, which have encouraged dependency and, consequently, led to poverty. This reorientation also links the *individual* irresponsibility of families who live beyond their means, to

¹¹⁸ See Jensen (2012, 2014), Jensen and Tyler (2015), and Wiggan (2012) for further examinations of this discursive trope.

the *national* irresponsibility of the Labour Government(s), who also lived beyond their means, thus connecting imaginaries of ‘broken families’ to those of a ‘broken Britain’ – as Tracy Shildrick and her colleagues (2016) argue in relation to the *Troubled Families Programme*, discussed further below.

While welfare dependency is not discussed as such in the 2017 document, the phrase ‘for some families, worklessness, not employment, is the *norm*’ (DWP 2017a: 3, 4, 7, emphasis mine) is repeated three times. The statement ‘children in workless households are considerably more likely to repeat the poorer outcomes of their parents’ (*ibid.*: 8) further reinforces the idea that worklessness can become normative and, thus, be intergenerationally reproduced in the family. The 2011 document argues, similarly, that ‘growing up in a workless family often has persistent effects later in life and is correlated with future worklessness’ (DfE 2011: 15). Consequently, ‘poverty can be such a destructive force because of its long-term grip on families and communities, holding them back generation after generation’ (*ibid.*: 15). These claims have been at least partially refuted by a study conducted by Robert MacDonald and his colleagues (2014a, 2014b) that found no evidence of ‘intergenerational cultures of worklessness’ in the UK. Nonetheless, because of the supposed normative – and therefore transmittable – nature of worklessness, the documents’ suggested approach to tackling poverty and engrained disadvantage is designed specifically to intervene in *the reproduction of the norm*. Traditional methods for dealing with poverty are insufficient precisely because worklessness is seen as normative and reproducible: ‘because the root causes are not financial, our approach goes beyond the safety net our welfare system provides’ (DWP 2017a: 3).

Overall the documents’ framings suggest that the children of poor parents tend to also be poor, *not* because of growing up with material or economic disadvantage, but because they can *acquire* the norm of worklessness from their parents.¹¹⁹ The specific mechanism through which

¹¹⁹ As Dorling argues, in Britain today children’s life chances *are* more strongly determined ‘by where (and to whom) they were born as compared to any other date in the last 651

this ‘acquisition’ takes place is, simply, by not witnessing or experiencing one’s parents go to work. The argument advanced in the 2011 document suggests that ‘the way that disadvantage perpetuates is shaped by the *experiences*, attainment and outcomes of children growing up in socio-economic disadvantage and by the way that negative parental activities experienced through childhood may repeat in adulthood’ (DfE 2011: 15, emphasis mine). Similarly, in the 2012 consultation ‘*seeing* a parent go out to work’ is credited as an experience that is ‘vital to childhood’ (CPU 2012: 1, emphasis mine), and in his 2015 announcement Duncan Smith claims that work ‘provides purpose, responsibility and role models for our children’ (HC Deb 2015: c1505). Finally, in 2017 the ‘Government wants the parents of these children to have the chance to earn a living, and to overcome the issues that hold them back’ (DWP 2017a: 4), but in order for this to be possible, children need to be able to ‘benefit from the stability and good example of working parents’ (*ibid.*: 3). In these discursive framings, it is the experience of *witnessing* one’s parents go to work that is crucial for children’s development and future outcomes – and, importantly, more so than any potential income generated by parental labour market activities.

In the 2011 document it is claimed that the Government’s ‘welfare reforms will mean that work pays and that we build responsibility and a *culture* of work’ (DfE 2011: 63, emphasis mine). In the discussion following the 2015 announcement, worklessness and poverty are also positioned as part of a person’s attitude and values – rather than as a consequence of, for instance, unfavourable labour market conditions. Conservative MP Heidi Allen offered her support for Duncan Smith and gave an example from her own experience as a small business owner:

when I gave [a previous employee] employment and put his money up, he was still *culturally unable* to find the mental drive to go to work. [--] I have seen it at the other end – you can drag a horse to water – so I welcome what the Secretary of State is trying to do. (HC Deb 2015: c1515, emphasis mine)

years’ (2007: 5). However, in his analysis, this is due to income and wealth inequalities, particularly in relation to housing, rather than to any ephemeral notion of culture.

Here Allen is making the case that being offered work alone does not work as a solution to worklessness, as focusing on the demand side leaves the *cultures* of worklessness intact. In response to this statement from the floor, Duncan Smith stated:

my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary is already engaged in driving schools to help inculcate and teach character resilience and key characteristics such as understanding what it is to go to work and to get up in the morning. (*ibid.*: c1515)

This exchange further highlights the positioning of worklessness as a matter of values, norms, and culture, as well as cements its framing through *paid* work alone – Duncan Smith and Allen are here not concerned with whether people are ‘culturally able’, or have the mental drive to, do care or volunteer work for instance. The commonsensical notion that for some people worklessness is the consequence of laziness and a lack of ‘character resilience’ – of simply not understanding what it means to get up to go to work every morning – supports the view that it is, indeed, something that parents can pass on to their children.

The ‘intergenerational cycle’ of disadvantage or poverty does not, however, just reflect the reproduction of worklessness from one generation to the next. The many other disadvantages discussed in the documents are part of the cycle: due to their causal relationship to worklessness they form a part of the process by which children can acquire worklessness and disadvantage from their parents. In the 2011 paper it is suggested that:

the disadvantages and barriers that parents experience are the source of [the] long-term impact [of poverty]. These barriers have a detrimental effect on children’s progression and well-being, which can impact right through into their adulthood, in turn affecting the subsequent generation. (DfE 2011: 15)

In the 2017 paper, similarly, explicit references are included to the ‘long-term impact on children’s development’ (DWP 2017a: 7) of issues such as poor parental mental health and parental conflict, thus suggesting that these issues can also be reflected in children’s *future* lives. What is at risk of being reproduced or passed on here is not about material conditions but, instead, about norms, values, and behavioural patterns – in short, about *culture*.

Parents – their norms and values, the ‘quality’ of their relationship, whether they are together or not and, perhaps most importantly, whether they have paid jobs or not – are, thus, positioned as centrally responsible for breaking the cycles of disadvantage or poverty. The documents’ discursive framings suggest that poor parents have the *choice* to pass the *right* kind of cultural values and norms on to their children – instead of the *dysfunctional* norms and values associated with worklessness, ‘low quality’ parental relationships, single parenting, and so on – and, thus, ensure that their children grow up to be responsible future citizens. These emphases echo the long-standing notion of parents, but particularly mothers, as the moral *guardians* or *regenerators* of the nation.¹²⁰ The discourses that position the poor or working-class lone mother at a distance from the ideal, ‘stable’, family, examined above, tend to also view her poor sexual and relationship choices as ‘emblematic of the breakdown of national morality and social order as a whole’ (2000: 89) as Carabine suggests. In current discursive framings of poverty, these connotations tend to materialise, in particular, in the connection forged between ‘broken families’ and ‘broken Britain’, suggesting that ‘unstable’ or non-normative families are to blame not only for societal moral decay, but also for cycles of welfare dependency and poverty, and the ‘bloated’ welfare state – and, consequently, even for the economic crisis and recession.

In the social worlds described by the documents, paid employment is, thus, not just important to poor families because of its material and financial value, but also – or, in fact, primarily – because of its *moral* and *cultural* value. The reproduction of the cycles of dependency, worklessness, and poverty is a consequence of the parental transmission of the *wrong* kinds of cultural norms and values to children – who can acquire worklessness simply by not witnessing their parents go to work. The emphasis on the potential *cultural* transmission of poverty, rather than on the reproduction of *material* disadvantage, again, helps push material poverty further away from the documents’ discursive framings. If a key aim is that parents are in

¹²⁰ On the positioning of mothers as central to societal and national morality, see for example, Alexander (1994), Collins (1999), and Yuval-Davis (1998).

paid employment – regardless of the level of material poverty they may still experience – in-work poverty is also pushed entirely out of view, as Bailey (2016) suggests. Further, these framings function to link the dysfunctional cultures of poor families to notions of societal moral crisis and ‘broken Britain.’ Centrally, then, a key discursive effect of the culturalisation of poverty is the separation of poor individuals and communities from the often-touted ‘hardworking families’ and ‘taxpayers’, with poor people labelled ‘as “other”, set apart from mainstream society as a result of allegedly dysfunctional values, attitudes and behaviour’ (Pemberton et al. 2016: 31). The argument that there is something *culturally distinct* about (poor, working-class) benefit recipient populations that sets them apart from the rest of society has a long history in UK politics, as evidenced by the continued discursive construction of a poor ‘underclass’, which I discuss in more detail in the next section.

From ‘Troubled Families’ to the ‘Underclass’

It has been estimated that there are around 120,000 families in England with multiple problems. (DfE 2011: 39-40)

Under the first [Troubled Families] programme, more than 116,000 families in England saw significant improvements. (DWP 2017a: 16)

As well as emphasising work as a panacea not only to poverty, but also to a whole host of other problems and disadvantages, the solutions and strategies offered in the 2011 and 2017 documents focus strongly on *specialist* or *targeted* support for families most in need.¹²¹ Most obviously this includes the *Troubled Families Programme* established in 2012, but a range of other targeted support is also highlighted as part of the Governments’ efforts to reduce (child) poverty. This focus reflects the common tendency in poverty discourses to separate the *most* poor or disadvantaged groups from others, thus sustaining a view of deprivation and poverty as both *distinct* from mainstream society and self-perpetuating,

¹²¹ Potential solutions are not discussed in the 2012 document due to its status as a consultation document.

as Gillies (2012) argues. Importantly, this discursive separation is usually based on supposed *cultural* differences between different groups of poor or disadvantaged people, and it, consequently, both depends on and reproduces the discursive culturalisation of poverty. The idea of a *culturally distinct* group of poor people has a long history in the UK – it is reflected, for example, in the long-standing separation between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor, and in the historical English ‘Poor Laws’ (Pemberton et al. 2016; MacDonald et al. 2014b; Wiggan 2012); in Eugenic thinking (Gillies 2012; MacDonald et al. 2014b); and even in the 1940s Beveridge Report that provided the blueprint for the welfare state in the UK.¹²² The notion of a dysfunctional, immoral, and/or criminal *underclass* – centrally reproduced in the poverty discourses under analysis here – is, thus, in no way new – and, in fact, it could be argued that this notion was built into the very foundations of the welfare state in the UK.

Both documents’ discussions of the proposed solutions to the issues they raise are peppered with references to the importance of paid employment for family stability and children’s futures. The 2011 document includes a section titled ‘Translating Our Vision into Reality and Next Steps’, arguing centrally that ‘both the policy-making and delivery landscape must change to ensure there is a stronger focus on incentivising behaviours that benefit children’ (DfE 2011: 63). ‘Incentivising’ in the document’s framing overall refers primarily to incentivising *work* by removing ‘financial disincentives to work from within the tax and benefits system’ (*ibid.*: 23). Similarly, in the 2017 document’s section ‘Next steps for action’ the emphasis is on helping families tackle the issues they face that ‘prevent [them] from getting back on their feet’ (DWP 2017a: 15), so that they are able to ‘move into work and go as far as their talents and hard work will take them’ (*ibid.*: 15) and, thus, ‘take advantage of the opportunities in a

¹²² Although Beveridge’s recommendations are usually viewed as a key example of social welfare provision based on the principle of *universalism*, as Romano (2017) points out, Beveridge did not, in fact, do away with conditionality and the less-eligibility principle entirely. Thus, the Beveridge Plan has also been interpreted ‘not as a break with but in terms of a continuity with the *liberal* past’ (*ibid.*: 43, emphasis in the original) – a past where the deserving/undeserving distinction played a central role. See also Pearson and Elson (2015) and Wiggan (2012).

fairer Britain' (*ibid.*: 21). Here the focus is squarely on paid employment as the best, and perhaps only, route out of not just worklessness, but also the many other disadvantages discussed earlier in the paper – and, ultimately, poverty and the 'cycle of disadvantage.'

The 2017 document's list of suggested solutions includes the next phase of the *Troubled Families Programme*, which will be used to 'encourage a greater emphasis on tackling worklessness and issues associated with it' (DWP 2017a: 16). Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants will have access to a Personal Support Package, 'which is tailored to people's individual needs to support them on a journey towards employment' (*ibid.*: 15). Similarly, 'Jobcentre Plus will go further to reflect the importance of work with all relevant local partners' (*ibid.*: 18), and employment is also to be placed 'at the centre of the recovery journey where work is assessed to be a good option as part of therapeutic treatment for [an] individual' experiencing drug or alcohol dependency (*ibid.*: 19). The 2011 document, similarly, makes work 'a goal for those dependant on drugs and alcohol' (DfE 2011: 29), and both also claim that work 'improves people's [--] mental and physical health' (*ibid.*: 23). A slight difference between the two documents lies in their discussions of people with disabilities, however. In 2011 the Government wants 'to ensure that disabled people who can work are supported to do so, while providing unconditional support to those who need it most' (DfE 2011: 29) – whereas in 2017, 'unconditional support' drops out of the framing: 'this Government is determined to do more to support workless families with disabilities' (DWP 2017a: 18). While the papers' earlier discussions of the many 'other disadvantages' perhaps suggested that these issues are important to tackle in and of themselves, when it comes to the solutions, however, the focus is almost exclusively on getting people (back) to work.

Since the availability of work is not discussed, and questions of demand do not enter the equation, as above the presented solutions paint a highly individualising picture of poverty. This individualising emphasis is repeated in the documents' discussions of service provision: for instance in relation to long-term debt, 'building financial capacity – the ability to

understand and manage money' (DfE 2011: 32) is presented as a key solution in the 2011 document. In relation to drug dependency, similarly, it is stated that the Government wants to better incentivise 'recovery outcomes' (*ibid.*: 30), which might include 'payment by results' provision – some of the common problems of which were discussed in Chapter 1. The 2017 document's discussion of issues such as homelessness, poor physical and mental health, problem debt, and substance abuse also lacks any mention of universally accessible governmental services designed to address them – although the recent increases in some of them can, in fact, be attributed to governmental cuts and reforms to welfare and other service provision.¹²³ The documents' highlighting of the harm that these issues pose to children, while at the same time not mentioning any potential structural or economic – or, indeed, governmental – causes for them, thus, has the discursive effect of framing both the issues themselves, and the potential solutions, in highly individualising terms.

The 2011 document's framing makes a separation between different groups of poor people explicit by arguing that the previous Government's focus on the relative income measure as the main poverty indicator had 'unintended consequences', as 'it did not distinguish between those families furthest from the poverty line and those just below the line' (DfE 2011: 19). The Coalition wants to, instead, focus specifically on 'families with multiple problems' (*ibid.*: 4, 21, 39, 40, 56, 59) – or variously on 'the most disadvantaged' (*ibid.*: 4, 12, 36, 39, 43, 50, 54), 'the most vulnerable' (*ibid.*: 36, 44, 55, 61), 'the neediest' (*ibid.*: 10), 'fragile' (*ibid.*: 4), or 'chaotic or crisis-ridden' (*ibid.*: 63) families. While most of the offered solutions are, indeed, about 'targeted support for those in disadvantaged circumstances', or about 'specialist intensive engagement with families facing entrenched

¹²³ For example, the increase from 2011 to 2016 in the number of households with dependent children living in temporary accommodation quoted in the 2017 document (DWP 2017a: 13) is, at least in significant part, a consequence of the recent changes to Local Housing Allowance rates and the introduction of the Benefit Cap (Rugg 2016). Similarly, while concern is expressed for children who have to change schools because of their families moving into temporary accommodation (DWP 2017a: 13), the practice of Local Authorities moving social housing clients far away from their homes – particularly from London into areas of the UK with lower housing costs – is rapidly increasing because of the combined effect of various governmental cuts and reforms (Halpin 2014; The Independent 2015), as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5.

and multiple problems', the document does also mention universal support services, recognising 'that all families need help at certain times, such as at the birth of a child' (*ibid.*: 21). Further, it is even suggested that universal provision may be necessary 'to de-stigmatise services' (*ibid.*: 63). However, such concerns are not present in the 2017 document, where the Government's approach is framed purely around tackling 'the complex issues that *some* families face' (DWP 2017a: 15, emphasis mine). Here the focus is on providing help that enables *particular*, problem – or 'troubled' – families to get back to work, which will, according to the documents' framing, also enable them to tackle any other issues they may be facing – such as material poverty.

Thus, in addition to the overwhelming emphasis on work, *targeted* help is strongly prioritised in both documents over universal support services. In fact, work (or more work) is the only solution consistently offered to *everyone* below the poverty line in the documents, whereas most of the other solutions discussed are extended only to the most precarious, 'needy', or 'chaotic' families – although, importantly, work is also central to the solutions offered to them. The *Troubled Families Programme* is positioned as central to the 2017 paper's approach. The discussion first highlights the improvements already made during the first phase of the programme and then examines its next steps, including a greater emphasis on tackling worklessness. This new focus is problematic especially given the low success rates of the programme specifically in relation to addressing worklessness – and, further, even more so in relation to helping families find work that lifts them out of poverty, as many others (Hayden and Jenkins 2014; Levitas 2012, 2014) have discussed.¹²⁴ Ruth Levitas also points out

¹²⁴ Levitas (2014) also discusses the many difficulties in reading and interpreting the data that the Government's claims of the programme's success are based – for instance, what counts as a family being 'turned around' differs greatly from area to area, and even from family to family. However, the available numbers indicate low levels of success even using the Government's own – rather lax – indicators of success. For example, only 35 per cent of families worked with (or 24 per cent of those identified and only 18.7 per cent of the estimated total) had been 'turned around' by October 2013 (*ibid.*: 4). Further, the programme was successful in terms of getting someone into continuous work only in the case of 2.3 per cent of the families worked with (or 1.5 per cent of those identified and only 1.2 per cent of the estimated total). Levitas further points at the Government's usage of 'unofficial data' and disclaimers 'to avoid the ethical scrutiny' that official governmental

that 'the amount of money taken away from the poorest families as a result of cuts in benefits and other support far outweighs the amount invested in the TFP' (2014: 1), highlighting the disconnect between governmental efforts to address poverty, and the governmental *causes* of said poverty. At times the attribution of success in the programme is, further, based on the reduced *cost* of various social issues to the taxpayer, rather than on any meaningful change in people's lives.

As well as its low success rates (based on its own criteria), the programme has also been criticised for the methodological and conceptual issues inherent in its design. Levitas (2012), for example, criticises the rather dubious methods by which the available data was interpreted that led to the figure of 120,000 troubled families. The programme, moreover, makes a curious discursive move from 'families that have troubles, through families that are "troubled", to families that are or cause trouble' (*ibid.*: 5). The shift from 'criteria of multiple deprivation to those of anti-social behaviour' (*ibid.*: 10) evident in the programme's implementation reflects a move from structural indicators to ones that more easily individualised, as Gedalof (2017) points out. Further, this discursive move has the effect of strongly correlating poverty and disadvantage with societal harm and criminality, thus associating poor, 'problem' families with a *generic dysfunctionality*. The use of sanctions, such as the threat of losing a tenancy, as a key mechanism to bring about change in the programme also signals the increasingly disciplinary nature of governmental interventions targeting poor populations, whereby the success of social policy measures is measured more and more by their impact on criminal justice agendas rather than on poverty or material wellbeing, as detailed by Sue Bond-Taylor (2014). This shift in emphasis masks the societal and economic factors behind crime, positioning it – similarly to poverty itself – as a matter of individual and cultural dysfunction. It also highlights a central tension within poverty prevention policy – between the stated aim of reducing poverty and the historical tendency for such policy to also have a

data is subject to (*ibid.*: 6), thus also making it difficult to assess the validity of the numbers themselves.

concomitant purpose in managing, containing, and regulating poor people.¹²⁵

The documents' strong focus on the poorest and most disadvantaged families, around whom a variety of social and economic problems supposedly coalesce, is, thus, strongly reminiscent of the notion of a not just poor, but also dysfunctional and criminal, 'underclass.'¹²⁶ This notion was popularised in the UK in the 1980s through the work of Charles Murray, who claimed to have identified a differentiated poor group 'with a distinct set of cultural values concerning worklessness, illegitimacy and criminality' (Pantazis 2016: 11). However, as Tracey Jensen points out, 'underclass' discourse has not suddenly reappeared in Coalition and Conservative rhetoric, but instead, 'it has been continually spoken and re-spoken through an ever-expanding palimpsest of categories' (2012: 5) – from 'chaotic', 'dysfunctional', and 'problem' families throughout the Blair, Brown, and Cameron Governments, to the terminology of the 'troubled family' prevalent in the 2017 paper under examination here. It also reanimates the much older separation between the deserving and undeserving poor, 'holding the undeserving responsible not only for their own predicament, but also for that of the "bloated" welfare state' (*ibid.*: 6) and, further, for the moral malaise supposedly afflicting the nation as a whole, as suggested in the previous section.

As many others (*ibid.*; Jones and Novak 1999; Pantazis 2016) have pointed out, a key feature of 'underclass' discourse is its flexibility or elasticity – both in terms of the shifting array of moral failings that it can be associated with and in relation to the various groups of people it can be deployed to mark and stigmatise. Thus, it is no surprise that, for example, the lone parents and people with disabilities who find themselves increasingly vilified by governmental discourse and policy, are also increasingly seen as part of an undeserving poor underclass. The elasticity of the concept is also evident in the *Troubled Families Programme* itself,

¹²⁵ See Jones and Novak (1999) and Lewis (2000) for more in-depth discussions of this dual purpose.

¹²⁶ For further examinations of 'underclass' discourse, see Clarke (2004), Jensen (2012), Shildrick et al. (2016), and Tyler (2013).

which has allowed – and, in fact, encouraged – Local Authorities to use their own criteria for identifying ‘troubled families’ in their area. Further, since the governmental estimates of the number of troubled families have been used by Local Authorities as *targets* in order to qualify for the attached funding, the available evidence also points to families being at times included on rather flimsy grounds (Levitas 2014). The expansion of the category of ‘troubled families’ is, thus, built into the very design of the programme – evident also in the recent discursive shift from 120,000 troubled families to 400,000 families ‘at risk’, as Shildrick et al. (2016) point out in their analysis of the programme. Further, they suggest that this also highlights a central paradox in ‘underclass’ discourse, as on the one hand a key discursive danger evident both in the programme itself and in the discourse more generally is that *all* families in poverty become synonymous with *trouble*. On the other hand, the discourse works, at the same time, to invisibilise the majority of poor people, as poverty comes to be associated with *just* the ‘underclass.’

Gedalof suggests that discourses of the ‘troubled family’ also carry a flipside – the *normative* family discussed above: ‘if the normative family is never problematized, all this means is an intensified surveillance of the troubled family by agents of the state, with its objectifying and abjectifying effects’ (2017: 135). The ‘hardworking taxpayers’ frequently positioned in opposition to the ‘underclass’, thus, indicate a discursive association with broader notions of *normativity* – cultural as well as, perhaps, sexual – in such a way that suggests that the cultural and criminal dysfunctions associated with the ‘underclass’ are never very far removed from assumptions of *sexual* immorality and impropriety. Finally, as Imogen Tyler (2013) points out, ‘underclass’ rhetoric also carries a citational history linked to eugenic thinking.¹²⁷ This citational history has contemporary consequences, most notably in the ways in which the contemporary vilification of poor, working-class mothers tends to be particularly

¹²⁷ See also McClintock’s (1995) discussion of the colonial discourse of ‘degeneracy’, which combined sexual and racial judgements and was applied to a range of immoral ‘others’ – racialised and colonised populations, as well as urban poor and working-class groups, particularly women.

stigmatising and pathologising in the case of racialised working-class mothers, as Carabine (2001) suggests. It has also led some to argue that ‘underclass’ discourse functions to *racialise* the white working-class.¹²⁸ While I do not agree that the white working-class is *in itself* in some way racialised through its characterisation as an ‘underclass’, these connotations can certainly materialise as present concerns and worries about *racial contamination* or ‘mixing’ – as I explore in more detail in the next chapter.¹²⁹

Despite the shifting and mutating nature of ‘underclass’ discourse, what remains constant, however, is the notion that those at the bottom of the economic hierarchy are also at the bottom of *moral* and *cultural* – as well as, perhaps, *sexual* – hierarchies and, importantly, at least partially so due to their own poor choices and dysfunctional ‘lifestyles.’ A representation of the poorest and most disadvantaged families as *culturally distinct* from the rest, afflicted by a whole range of economic, cultural, and moral dysfunctions – and, therefore, in need of specialist government intervention – is sustained in all the documents investigated in this chapter. Whereas work (or more work) is presented as the only – and an adequate – solution to the poverty of the masses, it alone is not enough to prevent the reproduction of the cycles of disadvantage and poverty for those at the very bottom of the economic hierarchy, since the root causes of this reproduction lie elsewhere. Consequently, the *Troubled Families Programme* and the targeted, multifaceted, and localised help it offers to ‘crisis-ridden’ families is a central pillar of the policy solutions offered in the 2017 document. Notwithstanding the many problems identified with the programme’s selection of participants, funding structure, implementation, and rates of success, it participates centrally in the discursive economies of the ‘underclass’ – with the effect of both minimising the extent to which poverty appears as a

¹²⁸ See, for example, Nayak (2009) and Rooke and Gidley (2010) for arguments along these lines.

¹²⁹ As Wiegman argues in her discussion of the scholarly trends that have examined ‘white trash’ and other white working-class groupings as *racialised*, the consequences of such a move are to disarticulate ‘racism from institutionalized practices of discrimination based on a group’s designated racial status and [to craft] for poor whites a position structurally comparable to that of a racial minority’ (2012: 184).

problem in the first place and maximising the extent to which it appears as a problem of *culture*.

Citizenship, Class and the Politics of Sexual Inequality

The previous four sections have each focused on a specific aspect of the poverty discourses put forward in the three policy documents released by the Coalition and Conservative Governments in 2011, 2012, and 2017. While my discussion has also identified a number of discursive shifts *between* the documents, the general tendencies towards the *individualisation*, *familialisation*, and *culturalisation* of poverty are sustained across all three. These discursive framings not only suggest that poverty can be culturally reproduced within families from one generation to the next, but they also function to separate the poorest and most disadvantaged from the rest. Poverty discourses, thus, help create and maintain a discursive split between a morally and culturally deficient and dysfunctional ‘underclass’ and the ‘hardworking taxpayers’ positioned just below (and above) the poverty line. Further, however, this discursive split also functions along the lines of *sexual* morality and respectability, suggesting that sexuality plays a key role in the separation of the ‘underclass’ from the rest – most obviously in the positioning of the ‘stable’, (hetero)normative, family as the ideal – from which lone and step parent families, as well as poor, working-class, and racialised families more generally, are seen to deviate. Finally, the moral decline associated with the ‘underclass’ is also discursively linked to notions of societal and national moral decline – exemplified in the rhetoric of ‘broken Britain.’ In this final section of the chapter I explore some of the political and cultural consequences of these discursive framings – firstly, on citizenship regimes and, secondly, on class analysis.

As detailed above, ‘family stability’ – with all of its normative connotations – is put on a pedestal in (child) poverty discourses. However, this is the case not only because a ‘stable’ family is viewed as a good environment for children to grow up in, but also because such an environment is seen as good or necessary for children’s development and future outcomes – and, consequently, for *national* futures. In this discursive

framing, stable families are needed *in the now*, in order to create *in the future* both functional and moral citizens and a stable nation. Jack Halberstam argues that the notion of the ‘normal’ that underpins respectability politics is ‘upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality’ (2005: 4).¹³⁰ The poverty discourses examined above fold familial futures into national futures precisely through such a logic of *reproductive temporality*, whereby the familial script of reproductive generationality also protects imaginaries of the nation’s future. The ‘hardworking taxpayers’ are, here, recognised as appropriately ‘activating their own (and their families’) futures’ (Allen and Taylor 2012: 4), whereas the dysfunctional ‘underclass’ are judged for failing to do so. By reproducing their own dysfunctional cultures instead, they, thus, also endanger the national future. Lauren Berlant (1997) argues, further, that the reproductive family that is centralised in such imaginaries is more often than not imagined as white – thus indicating the importance of processes of *racialisation* to imaginaries of deservingness.

Heterosexual coupledness and the nuclear family are, thus, here not only positioned as the norm that generates both familial and national stability, but also configured through a *temporal* logic. Further, in these imaginaries, it is *the child* as well as the nation that is imagined as under threat – and, consequently, in need of protection. Particularly through their emphasis on the importance of ‘good’ parenting, the poverty discourses investigated above place the child at the centre of their demand that poor parents (re)produce appropriate futures – ‘a direct call to arms to the productive and reproductive citizen to safeguard “our children” (and thus the future itself)’ (Smith, N. 2016: 245).¹³¹ The poverty discourses, thus, also make claims for and by *future citizens* – highlighting, as Sharon Pinkney argues, the processes by which ‘the child becomes a stand-in for a complicated set of anxieties and desires about national identity’ (2000: 113). It is only by reproducing (in) the stable family norm that poor parents can ensure that their own children turn out to be functional and responsible

¹³⁰ On reproductive temporalities, see also Edelman (2004).

¹³¹ On the figure of the child in such discursive framings, see also Breslow (2016).

citizens – and that they go on to, in turn, reproduce that very norm in and for their own children. The poverty discourses examined above make explicit the centrality of a reproductive generationality to imaginaries of the national future, thus also tying the survival of the nation to ‘personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidian’ (Berlant 1997: 4).

If citizenship is where attachments to the nation take place, as Berlant (2011) argues, then these imaginaries of a national future that depend on ‘family stability’ in the quotidian domain are central to the ways in which national belonging is forged. Further, since citizenship also ‘provides an index for [--] witnessing the processes of valorization that make different populations differently legitimate socially and under the law’ (Berlant 1997: 20), the discursive processes that mark the poorest of the poor as not only culturally dysfunctional, but also poor *because of* this dysfunctionality – and therefore as undeserving of state assistance – are also key to the question of who is symbolically and socially included in the fold of the nation. While many (Connor 2010; Duggan 2003; Weeks 2011) have argued that neoliberalisation or austerity has tended to mean the centralisation of paid work and/or consumerism within citizenship regimes – and I agree, to a degree – it would, at the same time, be a mistake to ignore the role that these familial, reproductive, and generational norms play in such regimes. Berlant argues that citizenship has become increasingly privatised, producing an ‘intimate public sphere’, whereby citizenship as a condition of social membership is ‘produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere’ (1997: 5). For her, citizenship is no longer directing personhood towards public life, but instead ‘contemporary nationalist ideology recognizes a public good only in a particularly constricted nation of simultaneously lived private world’ (*ibid.*: 5). In her argument, the national is, thus, not *displaced* by the intimate public sphere but, instead, *resignified* in privatised terms.

Gargi Bhattacharyya argues that discursive processes such as the ones examined above are not centrally about an intentional *retraditionalisation* of gender roles, as austerity ‘is not a project that

requires a particular approach to gender roles or the status of women' (2015: 150). Rather, for her, austerity requires a remaking of the terms of reproductive labour. However, while a 'return' to traditional gender roles may not be the *purpose* of the poverty discourses examined above, particular nostalgic and traditionalist imaginaries of the family are positioned in them in such a way that they come to dominate the fantasy life of the nation. Jensen's argument that the family is increasingly implicated 'within the blueprint of the nation' (2010: 3) certainly resonates with the poverty discourses examined above. As citizens are encouraged to take responsibility not just in relation to their own but also to the nation's future, it is specifically in the familial – or the private or intimate – sphere that this responsibilisation is expected to take place. In these discursive framings, 'broken Britain' can only be mended through appropriate familial (and sexual) acts in the private sphere – not through policy or political interventions alone.

As imaginaries of citizenship and the nation come to be configured in increasingly cultural, familial, and privatised terms, the economic and material conditions of citizenship tend to also be separated from questions of culture and subjectivity, as Berlant (1997) suggests. The privatisation, familialisation, and culturalisation of poverty, thus, also lead to a displacement of class – or, perhaps more accurately, the displacement of the material and economic *meanings* of class. The argument that the culturalisation of poverty and 'underclass' rhetoric lead to an 'evasion of socioeconomic class' (Jensen 2010: 2); 'substitution of class politics' (Jensen 2012: 5); 'discrediting and vanquishing the category "class"' (Atkinson et al. 2012: 8); or to class being 'obscured' (Valentine and Harris 2014: 84) or 'spoken euphemistically' (Skeggs 2004: 44), is well rehearsed in scholarship examining discourses of austerity and neoliberalism. Sometimes such arguments, however, also claim that the displacement of class occurs together with an increasing emphasis on, or a prioritising of, other 'axes of difference' (Valentine and Harris 2014: 84) or 'identity and difference' (Crompton and Scott 2005: 191). In these arguments, the decline of class is linked variously to the increasing prominence of identity categories, such as

gender and sexuality; of identity politics generally; or, rather vaguely, of *culture* – and, further, both processes are, in turn, connected to a growing factionalism or identitarianism in the left more generally. In the remainder of this chapter I argue that – rather than on an *over*-emphasis on sexuality and gender as identities – the displacement of class, in fact, depends on an *under*-emphasis on sexuality and gender as a key part of regimes of material inequality.

The increasing framing of poverty in cultural, familial, and privatised terms, examined throughout this chapter, has significant – policy, as well as other – consequences for the subjects and populations deemed *undeserving* in and by these discursive framings. Many of the *policy* changes detailed in Chapter 1 have been justified with direct reference to the argument that poverty is a consequence of the dysfunctional cultures and behaviour of poor people themselves. Above I have also argued that *sexual* judgements, assumptions, and norms play an important role in the ‘culturalisation of poverty’ thesis. The processes by which poverty and class-based inequalities are increasingly culturalised, individualised, and familialised – and, consequently, frequently hidden from view altogether – cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the role that sexuality plays in the discursive regimes that blame poor people for their own predicaments – as well as for the moral and economic malaise afflicting the nation as a whole. Sexuality is, thus, here conceived as central to the discursive and regulatory mechanisms that have been deployed time and time again to justify the material inequalities generated by and within austerity politics – rather than marginal or peripheral in the sense suggested by the arguments that blame identity politics for the displacement of class.

Thus, in the context of austerity, the imaginaries of deservingness that have deemed certain people and populations less deserving of state assistance depend on and reproduce various commonsensical assumptions about gender and sexuality. The demonisation of lone parent and other ‘troubled’ families in these imaginaries has much to do with sexuality – as well as with class for instance. *Sexual inequality* is, thus, *built into* the discursive regimes that culturalise, individualise, and familialise poverty, as

well as into the welfare and other policies that are justified with reference to these discursive framings. It is, therefore, the very discursive regimes that work to invisibilise socioeconomic inequality that also depend integrally on sexuality for the reproduction and maintenance of said inequality. Thus, the argument that class as a socio-economic category of difference is being *displaced* by culture or identity only works if sexuality and gender are treated as identity categories alone, thereby ignoring their operation as part of regimes of *material* inequality.¹³²

Many others have critiqued the common discursive separation of sexuality from the political economy – ‘a move that enables the “private” and feminized realm of social reproduction not only to be broken off from the “public” and masculine realm of political and economic power, but also to be removed from inquiry altogether’ (Smith, N. 2016: 234).¹³³ The assumption that the economy, or the political economy, can be easily separated from matters related to sexuality, gender, and intimacy is often based on a prior assumption that sexuality is a *wholly cultural* category that bears very little relevance to issues of economic (re)distribution and (in)equality. As Clare Hemmings argues, ‘culture sticks to sexuality’ (2011: 117), in such a way that sexuality tends to be ‘associated with superficiality and “leisure” rather than the serious business of politics’ (Hemmings 2018: 15). Such arguments presume ‘that the distinction between material and cultural life is a stable one’ (Butler 1997: 267), as well as ignore the ways in which this distinction itself functions as ‘a kind of *ruse* of capitalist liberal discourse – a ruse that obscures the intricate imbrications of relations of race, gender, sexuality, and class in the institutions of capitalist modernity’ (Duggan 2003: 83, emphasis in the original).

Curiously, however, as Clare Hemmings (2014) points out, many such critiques continue to rely on the homosexual/heterosexual distinction in making the case for the inclusion of sexuality in analyses of the political

¹³² Such arguments of course also ignore the many ways in which sexual (and other) identities may themselves act as the basis of various material inequalities.

¹³³ For various different incarnations of this argument, see also Berlant (1997, 2011), Butler (1997), Duggan (2003), Halberstam (2005), and Hemmings (2011, 2014, 2018).

economy.¹³⁴ At the same time as they in insightful ways critique the separation of sexuality from the political economy, for instance by highlighting the close connections between relations of production and heteronorms – or, increasingly, homonorms – they, nonetheless, tend to prioritise the material and economic inequalities that arise as a result of this relationship *for sexual minorities*. Hemmings specifically examines the well-known debate between Judith Butler (1997) and Nancy Fraser (1997), briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, where they both – despite their disagreements – continue to ‘read sexuality’s relation to political economy through a heterosexual/homosexual divide’ (Hemmings 2014: 376). Butler and Fraser (and many others) not only ignore the many *other* ways in which sexuality is sutured to the political economy, but they also place the weight of this relationship squarely on the shoulders of sexual minorities – as if all material sexual inequalities could be resolved by ensuring that LG(b) and queer subjects are not (disproportionately) represented in the working classes.¹³⁵

As I have argued above, the creation and maintenance of the sexual inequalities that materialise as a consequence of the problematisation of poverty as a cultural and familial issue does not depend on, or reproduce, the homosexual/heterosexual distinction. Instead, it is based, at least partially, on a heterofamilial, reproductive, and generational logic that positions those outside of it – whether gay or straight – as culturally dysfunctional and sexually improper – and, therefore, as *undeserving*. This logic weds the private and sexual lives of poor, racialised, benefit-receiving, and/or working-class populations to the fantasy life of the nation in such a way that the sexual inequalities that they may experience as a result appear to be of their own making. Class politics is here not so much being *displaced* by the increasing prominence of identity or cultural politics – or, indeed, a

¹³⁴ Arguably, and to an extent, this is the case for instance with Butler (1997), Duggan (2003), and Smith, N. (2016).

¹³⁵ Brown offers a further way of reading the relationship between class and ‘identity politics’, as she suggests that class resentment may be ‘displaced onto discourses of injustice other than class’, in such a way that ‘other markers of social difference may come to bear an inordinate weight; indeed they may bear all the weight of the sufferings produced by capitalism in addition to that attributable to the explicitly politicized marking’ (1995: 60).

politics of redistribution by a politics of recognition, to use Fraser's (1996, 1997) terms – but instead, the material operation of *both* class and sexuality within the political economy is obscured by the designation of both as cultural. Thus, the 'problem' with identity politics is not that it has led to a displacement of class, but rather that identities have come to bear *all* the discursive and political weight produced by the various vectors of power they represent – in such a way that the operation of these vectors of power outside of the realm of identity is both obscured and easily ignored. Overall then, the 'culturalisation of politics' that many (Clarke 2004; Imre 2014; Tyler 2013) have discussed and lamented, is at least partially the consequence of an *under-emphasis* on sexuality – as well as race, class, and gender – as part of regimes of material inequality, rather than that of an *over-emphasis* on the identities that attach to these markers of difference, or on identity politics more generally.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the (child) poverty discourses advanced in three key policy texts published during the Coalition and Conservative Governments. Firstly, I investigated the discourses of worklessness; 'family stability' and 'good' parenting; and 'cycles of disadvantage' put forward in the documents, arguing that they not only function to culturalise poverty, but also support the long-standing notion of a *culturally dysfunctional* 'underclass' – distinct both from mainstream society overall and from the *respectable* working poor especially. Secondly, I argued that the family is positioned in the documents both as the key site where poverty is reproduced and, consequently, as the appropriate target of government intervention. Overall, the documents' framings *culturalise*, *individualise*, and *familialise* poverty to a significant degree – discursive processes that centrally depend on the deployment of particular commonsensical assumptions and judgements about sexuality. Within austerity politics, sexual inequality is, thus, sustained by a heterofamilial, generational, and reproductive logic that marks those deemed outside of this logic as also outside of cultural and sexual respectability. These discursive framings link

the familial and sexual lives of poor, working-class, and benefit-receiving populations to the future fate of the nation, with citizenship increasingly understood as produced through personal acts and values in the quotidian or private sphere.

The 'culturalisation of poverty' thesis examined in this chapter is frequently associated with the – popular and scholarly – view that class politics are in decline. Rather than class politics being displaced by cultural or identity politics, however, I have argued that the discursive designation of both class and sexuality into the cultural sphere functions to obscure both of their material operation within the political economy. Sexuality has, thus, here been shown to play a central role in the discursive and regulatory processes that justify and sustain material inequalities in the austerity era – perhaps revealing the untenability of the cultural/material distinction overall. The next chapter examines two popular media texts – *I, Daniel Blake* and *Benefits Street* – and argues that they both, despite their many differences, participate in the figurative economies of the 'benefit scrounger' – a figuration that, in turn, depends centrally on sexualisation and racialisation for its legibility. Continuing this chapter's discussion of the working class/'underclass' distinction, the next chapter also focuses on the political consequences of the discourses and figurations it examines, arguing that the possibility of the 'benefit scrounger' appearing as a legible political subjectivity is foreclosed by her designation as a member of the culturally dysfunctional, as well as sexualised and racialised, 'underclass.'

The Making of the ‘Benefit Recipient/Scrounger’:

The Sexual Subjectivities of Austerity Politics

Chapter 4

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Introduction

The camera pans across an average-looking residential street in the UK, lined with two-storey Victorian houses. ‘Unemployed, unemployed, unemployed’, exclaims a young black woman – later named as Black Dee – as she points at house after house. The camera zooms in, the view alternating between heaps of rubbish, piled high in between the parked cars and the trees lining the road, and children – playing on the road, cycling on the pavement, and jumping over the fences separating the small front yards from one another. We are introduced to Mark – ‘a father of two who’s never had a paid job’ – and Becky, a young couple living on the street with their two children, Casey and Callum. Mark and Becky are having money trouble, and Callum has missed nursery again:

Becky: Do you know who writ to me today? D’you know
who sent mummy a letter? Your school.

Callum: Me not feeling too well. Me not going to nursery.

Becky: Why?

Callum: Because.

‘Many of the parents on James Turner Street are on benefits’, explains the voiceover, ‘On James Turner Street, kids are everywhere. Many are raised by single parents. Despite their ups and downs, Becky and Mark are still together. And around here, that’s not always a given.’

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Single mum Katie has arrived late to her Jobcentre appointment. She and her two children, Dylan and Daisy, have recently been moved up to Newcastle by their London council, from temporary accommodation in London – a homeless hostel in which they stayed for two years – and Katie does not know Newcastle very well. Because Katie has missed her appointment, the Jobcentre employee recommends her for a sanction. ‘My kid has to go to school tomorrow. I’ve got about twelve quid in my purse’, Katie tells the Jobcentre manager, who accuses her of ‘making a scene’ and asks her to leave. An older man who has been waiting in the queue for his appointment – Daniel Blake – gets up to defend Katie and is also asked to leave.

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These scenes – the opening scene for the third episode of Channel 4’s 2014 documentary series *Benefits Street* and an early scene from director Ken Loach’s 2016 film *I, Daniel Blake*, respectively – provide in many ways strikingly different portrayals of benefit recipients in austerity Britain. The latter a feature film, the former a documentary series; the latter criticised by Daily Mail blogger Toby Young (among others) for its ‘absurdly romantic view of benefit claimants’ (2016), the former attracting a storm of complaints both from the viewing public to media regulator Ofcom (Ofcom 2014) and from some of the people portrayed in the show (Plunkett 2014; Sommers 2015) for its demonisation of welfare recipients. Both portrayals, however, also highlight something important in relation to the emergence of

the figuration of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' as a highly salient and widely known figuration in public discourse. More specifically, as this chapter argues, both portrayals illustrate that it is, in particular, through the figure's sexualisation and racialisation that it becomes *legible* or *knowable* at all within the broader figurative and representational possibilities of the austerity era.

This chapter takes the sexualisation and racialisation of the hybrid or composite figure of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' as its primary focus, and traces its figuration and re-figuration as a sexually and racially saturated subjectivity across two media sites – *Benefits Street* and *I, Daniel Blake*. While many others have tracked the circulation of specific austerity figures across various different discursive arenas – the 'benefit scrounger' (Garthwaite 2011; Valentine and Harris 2014), the 'welfare dependent' 'skiver' (Jensen 2014), 'benefits broods' families (Jensen and Tyler 2015), and 'the chav mum' (Tyler 2008), to mention a few key examples – as the previous chapters have highlighted, my interest in this chapter is to explore and delve deeper into how these figures and their recent proliferation in media and political discourses highlight the emergence of a new, or re-configured, sexual subjectivity. In particular, in this chapter I argue that these figurations are sexually and racially saturated to such an extent that they only become *legible as subjects* through these processes. Thus, rather than examining the racialisation or sexualisation of a particular, pre-existing classed figuration, this chapter unpacks some of the ways in which this composite figuration only becomes legible as a classed subjectivity through its racialisation and sexualisation.

I begin with a section that introduces and further contextualises the two media texts examined in this chapter, as well as briefly discusses the figurative method employed, and the conceptual tool of *figurative economies* developed, in it. The rest of the chapter is divided into six parts, the first four of which investigate the take-up of specific aspects of austerity discourse within the media texts' representations. These sections draw on the previous chapter's examination of the discourses of 'worklessness', 'family stability', and 'cycles of poverty', examining both their affirmation and

contestation within the context of *Benefits Street* and *I, Daniel Blake*, with the third section focusing specifically on the representation of immigration and racialisation within them. I suggest various different potential readings of the texts, focusing specifically on the ways in which their circulation within the broader figurative economies of austerity influences how they can be read by audiences in the current political moment. The second to last section of the chapter ties these various discursive threads together in a discussion of the multiple and varied media and political responses to these two depictions of benefit recipients, tending to focus almost exclusively on the *truthfulness* of their representations. The final section continues the previous chapter's discussion of the working class/'underclass' distinction, arguing, firstly, that it is reproduced in the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' binary, and secondly, that the racialisation, sexualisation, and cultural dysfunction associated with one half of this binary function to discursively foreclose the possibility of its appearance as a legible *political* subjectivity.

Figurative Economies: Method and Materials

The first season of *Benefits Street* was filmed in Birmingham and originally aired in 2014, resulting in Channel 4's highest viewing figures since 2012 (Collier 2014) – as well as in much public discussion and media debate. The production company, *Love Productions*, was accused of exploitation in the making of the series, and many saw it as 'poverty porn' (Burrell 2014; Jensen 2014; Nelson 2014; Runswick-Cole and Goodley 2015). Yet, Ofcom's (2014) investigation concluded that broadcasting regulations had not been broken. Following *Benefits Street*, many other TV channels have tried to replicate Channel 4's success with documentary and reality television series such as *Saints and Scroungers* and *The Council* on BBC; and *The Big Benefits Handout*, *Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole*, *On Benefits: Breadline Brummies*, and *Undercover Benefits Cheat* on Channel 5. Channel 4 itself followed with a second season of *Benefits Street*, filmed in Stockton-on-Tees, as well as other series such as *How to Get a Council House*, *Benefits Britain 1949*, and *Britain's Benefit Tenants*. The success, popularity, and salience of reality TV focusing on the lives of welfare claimants, as well as of 'austerity TV' more broadly, is

also reflected in the many references to *Benefits Street* and other shows like it in parliamentary discussions and debates (discussed below); in the widespread media, particularly tabloid, coverage of the *Benefits Street* participants' lives after the series; as well as in the scholarly interest generated by the series itself (Jensen 2014; MacDonald et al. 2014a; Runswick-Cole and Goodley 2015).

I, Daniel Blake was released in 2016 to much critical acclaim.¹³⁶ Director Ken Loach's most successful UK release ever (Wade 2016), the drama film attracted a significant amount of political debate, as well as both positive and negative media attention. Continuing Loach's well-known critical, social realist filmmaking style – aiming, in his own words, 'to show [the] truth; to elucidate it, to tease it out' (quoted in Kermode 2014) – the film's dramatic effect arises directly from the struggles of the ordinary people portrayed in it, similarly to his 1966 *Cathy Come Home*. *I, Daniel Blake* was widely represented as a political intervention into the effects of the current dismantling of the UK welfare system under austerity. Perhaps the most preeminent sympathetic representation of benefit claimants available in the mainstream in the UK, it also, similarly to *Benefits Street*, elicited some scholarly interest (O'Brien 2017; Smith, J. 2016; VandenBosch 2017), as well as numerous references to its portrayal of the welfare system in parliamentary discussions and debates. Much of this debate and discussion focused, specifically, on the *authenticity* of the film's representation of benefit claimants and the benefits system, with Loach himself defending his research for the film's fictionalised portrayal as being as 'rigorous as any piece of journalism' (quoted in Seymour 2017).

Reality TV is often coded as a form of 'low art', in contrast to more traditional forms of 'high art' – represented by films such as *I, Daniel Blake* – also suggesting a *gendered* coding of the former as feminine and the latter as masculine, as others (Holmes and Jermyn 2014; Weber 2014) have argued. While the feminisation of reality TV perhaps also indicates it is less worthy of scholarly inquiry, recent years have seen an explosion in scholarly

¹³⁶ Palme D'Or 2016, BAFTA – Best British Film 2017, and Cesar Award – Best Foreign Film 2017.

interest in examining reality TV.¹³⁷ It has been suggested that reality TV's allure arises precisely from 'its combination of real people and surreal experiences', or the 'analytic of artifice and authenticity' it employs (Weber 2014: 4). Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood argue, similarly, that in the cultural environment of reality TV 'viewers, participants and producers are less invested in absolute truth and representational ethics, and more interested in the space that exists between reality and fiction, in which new levels of representational play and reflexivity are visualised' (2011: 6). The media furore that followed the release of *Benefits Street*, however, suggests that at least a significant proportion of both viewers and participants *were* extremely concerned with 'absolute truth', as much of the debate the programme generated related specifically to the *truthfulness* of its representations – similarly to *I, Daniel Blake*.

In this chapter I examine these two media texts together, not to suggest that they are similar *as* media texts, but to highlight the salience of particular kinds of representations and figurations of benefit recipients in the public arena of austerity politics. Both *I, Daniel Blake* and *Benefits Street* depict the lives of people who receive various kinds of welfare benefits, highlighting their personal struggles with poverty and unemployment. Both are examples of media culture that 'involves hegemonic processes of sense making' (Negra and Tasker 2014: 2), whereby 'fictions of the human subject are produced and circulated' (Blackman and Walkerdine 2001: 6). These fictions, particularly prominent ones, also have critical discursive and political consequences, for instance in the significant role that they play in setting the discursive terms for how people are able to relate to themselves and others, as suggested in Chapter 2. Although *Benefits Street* is a documentary series, featuring real people in receipt of social welfare, and *I, Daniel Blake* is a fictional account of people navigating the UK's benefits system, they both involve such 'fictions of the human subject', in the sense that various editorial and directorial choices were necessarily made in order

¹³⁷ On reality TV, including analyses of specific reality TV programmes, see for instance, Hill (2015), Imre (2014), Jensen and Ringrose (2014), Ouellette (2014), Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008), Skeggs (2005, 2009b, 2010), Skeggs and Wood (2011), Springer (2014), and Stephens (2014).

to construct clear, recognisable, and compelling narratives out of messy and complex individual lives. For this reason, I use the terminology of 'characters' and 'narratives' in relation to both texts – in order to foreground the *constructedness* of the stories they put forward about their subjects, as well as to signal my interest in these manufactured stories, rather than necessarily in the actual, lived lives of the *Benefits Street* participants.

My juxtaposing of these two media texts that, admittedly, represent very different genres is, thus, intended to explore the similarities – as well as the, perhaps more obvious, differences – evident in their representations and figurations of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger', as well as to investigate the texts' consequent *cultural* and *political resonance*. The analysis that follows, thus, includes moments of both highly critical and more generous readings of the two media texts. While the *violent* nature of the representations of *Benefits Street* and, conversely, the *sympathetic* nature of those of *I, Daniel Blake*, may be obvious to many viewers, in this chapter my aim is to highlight that in both texts 'a wrestle of different frameworks of visibility' (Sedgwick 2003: 140, emphasis in the original) is, nonetheless, evident. It is precisely the supposed *obviousness* of the reading of *Benefits Street* as a violent portrayal, and of *I, Daniel Blake* as a sympathetic one, that masks some of the other representational frameworks at play in both. Thus, I pay attention to both reproductions and contestations of the common austerity discourses examined in the previous chapter in the two media texts, while at the same time indicating that it is not surprising that only *some* of these reproductions and contestations have been taken up in the significant media debates that followed their releases. Specifically, while *Benefits Street* was accused of – or celebrated for, depending on the political viewpoint of the critic – reproducing the most violent, demonising discourses about benefit *scroungers*; *I, Daniel Blake* was praised – or again, blamed – for its contestation of these same discourses and, thus, for more sympathetically portraying benefit *recipients*.

The 'benefit recipient/scrounger' figuration is a salient image 'of the Other' that 'constantly return[s] and [is] told and retold within the cultural sphere', particularly 'at times when the invisible normative image is

threatened, or at times of flux, resistance, change and upheaval' (Blackman and Walkerdine 2001: 166). While the truth claims made by *Benefits Street* and *I, Daniel Blake* are different due to the different genres they represent, they, nonetheless, frequently participate in the same *figurative economies* – those of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger.' As Chapter 2 detailed, my conception of 'figurative economies' here draws on Sara Ahmed's (2004) use of 'affective economies', indicating that figurations do not originate in particular representational objects, but are, instead, reinforced and reproduced *between* them. Specific cultural objects, such as *I, Daniel Blake* and *Benefits Street*, become specific points within multiple figurative economies, rather than the origin or destination of the discourses that cluster around the 'benefit scrounging' figurations. Consequently, I also question whether the texts' circulation within the broader figurative economies of austerity politics limits and conditions the stories they can tell, and thus influences the ways in which they can be read by audiences in the current political moment. The claim to *truthfulness* and *authenticity* that has attached to both texts, specifically, indicates their embeddedness in the figurative economies of austerity that limit what can publicly be said – and heard – about benefit recipients in the current time.

Since this chapter specifically aims to highlight the emergence of new or reconfigured *sexual* subjectivities in the figuration of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger', much of its analysis focuses on examining the deployment of sexuality – as well as race – in representations of this figure. I highlight commonalities and differences in the texts' figuration of benefit recipients, focusing particularly on how these figurations utilise various sexualised and racialised discursive tropes in their making of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger.' These discourses at times both reproduce and challenge the conceptualisation of 'worklessness' through paid work alone; the framing of the 'stable family' through a (hetero)normative notion of reproductive futurity; and the common discursive trope of 'cultural poverty' – with the chapter, thus, centrally intervening in and complicating the various austerity discourses investigated in the previous chapter. Further, and as in the previous chapter, my argument in this chapter also

foregrounds the interrelatedness of processes of sexualisation to other processes of social categorisation – thus highlighting that intervening in sexuality also enables a different view and analysis to emerge of processes of classing and racialising.

My use of the concept of figurative economies here enables me to make the argument that because of their circulation in these economies, the texts' representations of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' only becomes legible as such because of his or her sexualisation and/or racialisation. This framework of legibility will also be shown, to a considerable extent, to determine which side of this hybrid figuration – benefit recipient *or* benefit scrounger – a particular representation falls, as well as, consequently, to significantly influence the kinds of responses these representations (can) elicit. Thus, I also argue that the political and cultural consequences of the two media texts are conditioned by, or hinge on, the figurative economies within which they circulate.

Worklessness and Narratives of the 'Good Life'

Has the Secretary of State managed to watch programmes such as 'Benefits Street' and 'On Benefits & Proud'? If so, has he, like me, been struck by the number of people on them who manage to combine complaining about welfare reform with being able to afford to buy copious amounts of cigarettes, have lots of tattoos, and watch Sky TV on the obligatory widescreen television? Does he understand the concerns and irritation of many people who go to work every day and pay their taxes but cannot afford those kinds of luxuries? (Philip Davies, Conservative MP for Shipley, in HC Deb 2014a: c579)

Each episode of *Benefits Street* opens with the voiceover introducing the main site of the documentary series – James Turner Street in Birmingham – as 'not your average street. There are 99 houses, 13 nationalities, and most of the residents are claiming benefits', followed by central character and self-proclaimed 'mum of the street' White Dee's retort: 'probably five per cent of people on this street are working.' While the accuracy of Dee's

estimate has been refuted,¹³⁸ this opening sequence, nonetheless, functions to establish James Turner Street as a highly exceptional space that can, consequently, be juxtaposed with the 'hardworking taxpayers' of the rest of the country – as MP Philip Davies does in the above quote. The representation of James Turner Street as a *workless* space is reinforced and consolidated throughout the series with voiceover statements such as 'without work in the morning, some on the street stay up all night' – following footage of children playing in the road after dark – and, 'it's 8.30am. For those who have a job, it's time to go to work', both from episode 3. Much of the content of the series also focuses on work, whether it is in following the characters in their job searching efforts; in highlighting the uniqueness of the residents who are in paid employment (such as Ewan, a council IT worker); or in representing other aspects of the characters' lives *through* their lack of paid employment, such as in the discursive connection made by the voiceover in the excerpt included in the beginning of this chapter between the family receiving benefits, on the one hand, and both Callum's misbehaviour and Becky's seeming inability to control him, on the other.

While *Benefits Street* does not reveal much about White Dee's work history, a vague allusion is made to her being on anti-depressants. Together with the series' overwhelming emphasis on worklessness, the fact that this allusion is not explored further easily gives the impression that White Dee and many other characters are on benefits only or primarily because of not being in work. Sickness and disability benefits are not focused on in the series, whereas repeated references are made to 'signing on', and the storylines of many characters include them fulfilling various Jobcentre requirements. These omissions and emphases suggest that most people on benefits are, in fact, in receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA), and they, thus, function to strengthen the discursive connections between social welfare and worklessness.¹³⁹ The inclusion of sickness and disability benefits in the

¹³⁸ In 2008-9, 39 per cent of adults on the street were working, more than the 35 per cent claiming JSA or disability and sickness benefits (Baker 2014).

¹³⁹ In fact, a very small proportion of UK's overall welfare spending goes towards unemployment-related benefits: for example in 2016, this proportion was one per cent;

programme's discursive framings would disrupt both these imaginaries of undeservingness and the casting of benefit recipients as 'workless scroungers.' Arguably this disruption is made intentionally in *I, Daniel Blake*, which focuses centrally on Daniel's stressful and distressing quest to be recognised as deserving of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) following a major heart attack that ended his life-long career as a carpenter. Scenes portraying his frustrating experience with the 'healthcare professional, hired by the Department of Work and Pensions' at his Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and him waiting for an afternoon on hold to a DWP call centre, thus, deliberately place in question the audiences' expectations of the responsibilities of the UK welfare state within the austerity context.

Despite its central focus on Daniel's journey to get his illness recognised by the state, the film does also deploy the discourse of 'worklessness' – albeit in a less explicit way than its reproduction in *Benefits Street*. Katie, the single mum who develops a friendship with Daniel during the film, has been unemployed for a while but has aspirations to go 'back to the books' and finish her course at the Open University. Her financial struggles seem to, at least for the most part, stem from her being sanctioned and from being moved a long distance away from her extended family and support network – an increasing practice that is explored in more detail in the next chapter. As Katie is unable to financially support her children, she ends up going to the food bank for groceries, shoplifting for tampons, and briefly forays into sex work, throughout all of which the film's narrative could be read as sustaining its focus on Katie's longing for a return to university and a paid job. In portraying Katie's desire as directed at a life and a future in which she has a 'proper' job, the film's narrative aligns with the discourse of 'worklessness', as well as reveals Katie's attachment to this particular imaginary of the 'good life' (Berlant 2011). For Katie, the only *imaginable* route out of poverty is one of paid employment and, thus, any

with 42 per cent going towards pensions; 18 per cent towards family benefits, income support, and tax credits; 16 per cent towards incapacity, disability, and injury benefits; 13 per cent towards personal social services and other benefits; and ten per cent towards housing benefits (ONS 2016).

future in which she raises her children while continuing to receive benefits is discursively foreclosed.

While a future and a good life in which Katie is able to sustain and support her family on benefits is an impossible dream and desire in the narrative structure of *I, Daniel Blake*, for many of the residents of James Turner Street finding a paid job is a distant and unlikely – and in some cases, also an *undesirable* – possibility. Citing a variety of different reasons for why they are unlikely to find paid employment anytime soon – from histories of drug or alcohol abuse, time spent in prison, and lack of work permits, to mental health issues and learning difficulties – many of the residents of James Turner Street explicitly affirm the futility of maintaining an attachment to an imaginary of the ‘good life’ in which paid employment is valued above all other activities. Thus, while, on the one hand, the overarching narrative purported by the series tends to support the notion of worklessness; on the other hand, the narratives of many characters function to, in fact, highlight the ways in which the ‘worklessness’ discourse masks and covers over structural issues with the labour market, as discussed in the previous chapter. For many of the residents of James Turner Street, finding paid employment that, for example, pays enough to cover the cost of childcare is, in reality, an unlikely possibility in the labour market conditions that they face. Reading these two texts together, it is, thus, the James Turner residents’ – at times explicit, at times implicit – acknowledgement of the hollowness of this particular ‘good life’ narrative that also reveals the cruel nature of Katie’s sustained optimistic attachment to that same narrative.¹⁴⁰

White Dee, the self-appointed mum of James Turner, provides a particularly interesting juxtaposition to Katie’s desire for a future in which she no longer receives benefits. White Dee states that, while she is ‘not too old to dream’, at this point in her life all of her dreams are for her children. Apart from raising her two children, Gerrard and Caitlin, she is portrayed in the series as the person whom everyone goes to whenever they are in trouble – a sort of part one-woman neighbourhood watch, part social

¹⁴⁰ This reading, perhaps, also challenges feminist positions that centralise women’s labour market participation in their framings of equality politics – some of which were discussed in Chapter 1.

worker, part dispute mediator. She spends her time taking care of the many needs of various neighbours of hers (most often Fungi, a recovering drug addict), solving disputes between them, and helping them with benefits forms and other dealings with government agencies – or, in other words, her days are filled with various kinds of informal *care and social work*. While both Katie and White Dee are single mothers of two, and both are on benefits, it is precisely the kind of life led by White Dee – full of (care) work and, yet, supported by benefits – that is unimaginable either as a long-term life situation or a future prospect in Katie’s narrative framing – although some of the film’s depictions of reciprocal care relations do challenge this reading of Katie’s story, as I explore in more detail below. In some ways, then, White Dee’s narrative stands in contrast both to that of Katie’s, with its affirmation of the ‘good life’ as centrally striving to avoid worklessness; and to the overall focus *Benefits Street* maintains on paid employment – or the search for it – as the main aspect of most of its characters’ lives and narratives.

Thus, while *Benefits Street* does not explicitly depict Dee’s activities as care *work*, this representation, nonetheless, highlights a potential frame through which to view social welfare and the kinds of lives that are enabled by it – or indeed, that are imaginable in the discursive context of austerity. Juxtaposing White Dee’s story with Katie’s also, then, allows us to imagine a different kind of potential future for Katie – perhaps one in which Katie faces a fairer benefits system, is not sanctioned, and gets to live closer to her family in London. Were this kind of a vision of the ‘good life’ enabled by the narrative structure of *I, Daniel Blake*, would Katie still long for paid employment as the answer to her problems? Or would her desire become *politically* oriented instead, perhaps towards a welfare system that does not impose sanctions that are likely to make people destitute, or a state that does not send people to live on the other side of the country, far away from their families? And indeed, what other kinds of political imaginaries – other than those focusing on questions of redistribution – might be opened up by this reading more generally? Perhaps it is precisely because the discourse of ‘worklessness’ has, in the context of austerity politics, become so closely tied

together with any possible visions of the 'good life' that a representation in which Katie is both a deserving benefit *recipient* and not wishing for paid employment, is *unimaginable*. In contrast, *Benefits Street* can represent its characters as not perpetually longing and searching for paid employment – but only because they have already been marked as undeserving benefit *scroungers*.

This discussion, thus, also reveals something important about the relationship between – and slippage across – the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' pairing. The two can only ever be separated retrospectively or in projecting to the future, whereas in the present they are always in danger of being read as one and the same. In other words, the figure of the deserving benefit recipient only ever fully exists in the past or the future, whereas in the present she is always in danger of slipping into the frame of, and being read as, a 'scrounger' instead. Daniel's story suggests that the UK welfare state can no longer be relied on to provide care in moments of sickness and disability, but his clear positioning as deserving can only be sustained because he was *previously* consistently employed and only recently became 'workless.' Katie, similarly, can appear as deserving because the audience knows that *eventually* she will come off benefits and become a financially productive, tax-paying member of society – although as the discussion below highlights, this is only one possible reading of Katie's story. Further, whether she will still be in poverty is of course also a different issue, as highlighted by the previous chapter's discussion of in-work poverty. Conversely, White Dee can easily be read through the 'benefit scrounger' frame, as throughout her narrative in *Benefits Street* she does not express any desire to find paid employment – with her representation perhaps conforming more closely to the stereotype highlighted by Philip Davies MP at the beginning of this section – while her engagement in care work can be ignored in the programme's framing.

As long as the discursive frame of the deserving benefit recipient cannot acknowledge the *work* of child and neighbour care that both Katie and White Dee are engaged in, these two characters (and many others like them) remain discursively stuck in a narrative jostling between the two

poles of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' pairing. Conversely, as long as the legibility of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' figure depends on reproducing the 'worklessness' discourse, either reaffirming it (in the case of the 'scrounger') or promising to transcend it in the future (in the case of the deserving benefit recipient), the discursive framing of this figure cannot allow for different visions of the 'good life' to emerge and be seen as legitimate. Importantly, these discursive framings – of the scroungers of *Benefits Street* as uninterested in becoming a 'contributing' (with only paid work ever counting as a 'contribution') member of society, and of the benefit recipients of *I, Daniel Blake* as needing to continuously assure the viewer that their being on benefits is only temporary – also position the viewer in particular ways. Perhaps different points of entry to, and identification with, the discursive framings of both texts would be available to viewers who have undergone or are undergoing similar experiences themselves. Thus, it is specifically their circulation in the figurative economies of austerity that helps position both *Benefits Street* and *I, Daniel Blake* as sites for the potential reproduction of both the worklessness discourse and these common imaginaries of (un)deservingness.

Family Stability, Care, and the Loss of the Male Breadwinner

Episode 5 of *Benefits Street* focuses on Hannah and Simba, who live together with Hannah's two kids from a previous relationship but are now having relationship trouble. Zimbabwean Simba did not apply for a new visa on time and is now without a work permit, as well as ineligible for benefits. Simba has started drinking and smoking more than before, and Hannah wants to move out. However, in order to have the time to find a new place, her kids need to move in with their father for a while. Hannah is heartbroken about not living with her kids, and Simba is furious at Hannah for leaving him, as well as at mutual friend Tich for helping Hannah out during the breakup. While Hannah's story gets a happy ending – she is able to find a new house fairly quickly in her sister's neighbourhood and does not have to part with her kids after all – the episode ends with an altogether more melancholic note: the voiceover exclaims 'there's a saying "when

poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window”, and James Turner street can be a rocky road for relationships’, as the camera zooms in on a used pregnancy test left on the road. The discursive links between receiving social welfare, on the one hand, and ‘broken’ relationships or ‘unstable’ families, accidental pregnancies, and non-normative family forms, on the other, are made painstakingly clear throughout the series, thus strongly conforming to the ‘family stability’ discourse examined in the previous chapter.

Most of the *Benefits Street* characters who have kids are either single mothers, or parents who are, for various reasons, not allowed to see their children. In addition to Hannah and Simba, whose relationship we witness breaking down in the fifth episode, among the few couples *Benefits Street* introduces the audience to are Becky and Mark, mentioned above, and Ana and Abdul, a couple whose wedding is one of the central storylines in the second episode. Ana is a Polish Mormon, and Abdul an Algerian Muslim, and as a result of the cultural differences between them, Ana explains, they have to ‘mix things’ and ‘sacrifice a little bit.’ While Ana and Abdul themselves seem happy, there is a rumour going around in the neighbourhood that Abdul is paying Ana to marry him, and some of their neighbours are suspicious of their relationship. Becky thinks that their relationship is ‘not about love, it’s about money innit’, and White Dee suspects the couple are getting married ‘for a green card, is that what they call it nowadays?’ The question of the *authenticity* of Ana and Abdul’s relationship is not in any way resolved in the episode and is, thus, left hanging in the air, for the audience to grapple with. The placement of their narrative in the episode that centrally focuses on issues around immigration works to further position their relationship as entangled in issues of (in)authenticity, conjuring up images of ‘sham’ marriages (Gedalof 2017) and ‘bogus’ immigrants (Ahmed 2004).

Becky and Mark, on the other hand, are depicted in *Benefits Street* as one of the few parent couples who have not broken up and are raising their kids together: ‘this is a street where many kids are raised by single parents. Mark and Becky are one of the few couples trying to make a go of it

together.’ The representation of their relationship focuses, firstly, on their struggles to control and parent their children, particularly four-year-old Callum, and, secondly, on Mark’s job-hunting efforts. We see Mark, who has never had a paid job, go off to a CV-writing workshop and proudly tell his son: ‘when daddy’s finished, he’ll be able to go out and work.’ He eventually finds a job, but as it is commission-only, he soon finds himself working long hours without any financial compensation at all and ends up quitting the job after just two days. Mark’s repeated failure to find a job is punctuated by footage of him idly cycling around and doing tricks on his bike. In another scene at the food bank, after Mark fails to obtain the family’s food bag because the voucher is in Becky’s name, he tells the camera he feels like ‘the unluckiest guy in the planet.’ Afterwards, Becky is on the phone to social services, and we hear her say: ‘no he’s a full-time dad as well’, presumably answering a question enquiring about Mark’s job. This answer to an unspecified question cements Mark’s narrative as one of recurrent failure – and importantly, here, not just failure to find a job, but also failure to fulfil the traditional role of the breadwinner father.

While these three relationships are overall depicted in somewhat different ways, one key element of similarity is their positioning as at some *distance* from the ideal (parent) couple of a male breadwinner and a female caregiver. Ana and Abdul’s relationship is potentially ‘fake’, Hannah and Simba’s is broken, and Mark fails repeatedly to be(come) the male breadwinner to his caretaker wife. However, as well as one of the few couples ‘trying to make a go of it together’, Becky and Mark’s family is also the only prominently featured one on the show that is entirely white. The other two couples are not only racialised, but also depicted as mired in struggles with immigration authorities. Further, and importantly, these struggles are presented *as part of* their positioning as couples and families, thus suggesting that their family life is somehow also destabilised as a consequence – although not in the way that families *are* frequently destabilised and broken apart as a result of immigration laws and regulations, such as the recent changes to UK family reunification laws (Sirriyeh 2015). Thus, despite the similarities, the couples do not all appear

to be at the *same* distance from the imaginary ideal of the normative family – while Becky and Mark are at least *trying* to parent together, Hannah and Simba’s relationship is already broken because of his mistake in relation to reconfirming his immigration status, and Ana and Abdul’s relationship may not be real in the first place. Here, common imaginaries of immigrants as deceitful, and of their relationships as always potentially ‘fake’, combine with the ‘family stability’ discourse to mark the racialised, (part-)immigrant families as *even further* from the ideal.¹⁴¹

Nonetheless, it is only by reading these relationships *in relation to* the ideal, heteronormative male breadwinner/female caregiver paradigm that the narratives of failure and inauthenticity become visible in the first place. As a result of these framings, the representation of the three parent couples on James Turner Street come to be discursively connected to the narratives of the single parents on the street, in that they all, to varying degrees, appear as deviations from the ideal family form. Apart from White Dee and a couple of other single mothers, the other parents represented in the series are mostly currently unable to see their children. For example Fungi – White Dee’s friend and recurrent character – has three kids with different mothers but is not on talking terms with his oldest daughter and not allowed to see his youngest child, who was adopted at the age of four. Another character Sam is a mother of two, but she has not seen her kids since she started taking heroin. The camera follows her on a midnight trip to the ATM to withdraw her benefits as soon as they are paid into her account. These portrayals confirm not only the previous chapter’s argument that the ‘family stability’ discourse is rarely positioned very far from the judgement or stigmatisation of non-normative family *forms*, but also that both tend to be discursively linked to notions of *generic* cultural dysfunctionality and criminality.

The ‘benefit recipient/scrounger’ and her family, thus, appear in *Benefits Street* not just as continuously failing to attain the ideal family form, but also, as a result, as *always already* an ‘unstable’ family. In *I, Daniel Blake*,

¹⁴¹ See White (2014) for a discussion of some of the implications of the encounters non-normative couples have with immigration regimes and authorities to prove the ‘authenticity’ of their relationships.

Katie, also a single mother, is depicted as desperately trying to stabilise the environment in which her children are growing up after being sanctioned and left without a support network. She does not mention her children's fathers much, apart from referring to 'a bit of trouble' with Dylan's father, which led to her living in the homeless hostel in London in the first place. In Katie's discursive framing, similarly to the *Benefits Street* narratives, the male breadwinner/female caregiver paradigm only appears as a loss – in Katie's case a loss that took place before the film's narrative began. It is Daniel's entry into the family's life that, at least initially, fills the space left by this loss and, thus, also stabilises Katie's life. She is happy for Daniel to help out with odd jobs in her new house, and her kids seem to enjoy his company as well. As Katie struggles more and more to cope, Daniel becomes a bigger and bigger part of the family's life. In one particularly powerful sequence of scenes, Daniel helps Dylan and Daisy cover their windows with bubble wrap and use tea light candles for warmth. While Daniel does not exactly attempt to be a 'breadwinner' for Katie and her children, it is, nonetheless, only with his help and support that Katie begins to believe in her ability to make things work.

This rather normative framing in which Katie's life gets a new lease because of the entry of Daniel into her life is, to an extent, reproduced in Daniel's dealings with others. He accepts packages for his neighbour China and calls him 'son', as well as remembers fondly the caring relationship he had with his partner before her death: 'she was crazy, hard work. And I loved her to bits. I'm lost without her really.' Thus, early on in the film, moments of everyday intimacy and care appear as rather conventional – arguably echoing Lauren Berlant's (2011) discussion of normative notions of the 'good life.' For her, it is precisely 'proximity to the fantasy life of normativity' that 'remains to animate living on, for some on the contemporary economic bottom' (*ibid.*: 167); in the film it is Daniel – an older, white male figure – who repeatedly offers help and support to his younger – feminised and racialised – friends. Further, Katie and Daniel's relationship suffers a break when Katie, out of financial desperation, enters into sex work. Daniel finds out, storms into the house in which Katie is

preparing to see a client, and attempts to persuade her to leave. Katie refuses, goes back into the house, and her relationship with Daniel is put on hold. Katie's entry into sex work is not mentioned in the film after this episode – as the film's narrative folds in on Daniel's deteriorating health and financial situation and somewhat leaves Katie's struggles behind, the audience is left to decide for themselves whether Katie stays in this line of work.

Her entry into sex work can, certainly, be read as an error of judgement, an act of sheer desperation, or a momentary blip in an otherwise clear path towards *proper* paid employment and a life without reliance on benefits – and perhaps her reconciling of her relationship with Daniel at the end of the film confirms this reading. Katie's choice of work here appears *oppositional* to her intimate relationship with Daniel, as it is precisely Daniel's judgement and call for her to return to the safety and normativity of respectable femininity that endangers Katie's efforts to financially support herself and her children. In this reading, Katie's ability to leave the destitution she has been thrown into by sanctioning and the loss of her support networks is, thus, jeopardised by her intimate attachment to Daniel – in what is perhaps, to use Berlant's language, the clearest confirmation of the *cruelty* of such attachments in the film's narrative. However, moments of *complex, relational, and reciprocal* care later on in the film at least somewhat complicate the film's earlier sustained attachments to normative 'good life' fantasies.

China helps Daniel fill in an online appeal form after he has struggled to do it by himself at a public library, warning him: 'Dan they'll fuck you around, make it as miserable as possible. No accident. That's the plan! I know dozens who've just given up.' Following the argument with Katie, Daisy brings Daniel food as he sits alone in his flat, having sold all of his possessions to pay his bills. Finally, Katie walks Daniel to the appeal hearing that concludes the film. These later scenes *reverse* the earlier scenes' normative intimacies, positioning Daniel as the one who needs and accepts help and care from Katie and China. Over the course of the film, the characters learn to supplement the diminishing care provided by the

welfare state with their own relational care practices. While such practices certainly carry the danger of confounding the neoliberalising removal of the state from its responsibilities to care and provide for its citizens, at the same time they also challenge dominant representations of benefit recipients as both singularly *dependent* (Shakespeare 2000) and decidedly *irresponsible* – as explored in the previous chapter.¹⁴² Perhaps this reading of *I, Daniel Blake*, in turn, also suggests a different viewpoint as to the normative ethos of *Benefits Street*'s representation of families, intimacy, and care. After all, Becky and Mark's repeated failings in relation to the normative family ideal sit within the broader context of James Turner Street, where the family is part of a vast network of neighbours and friends that is repeatedly shown to care for and about each other. At the same time though, this care does not extend in quite the same way to Ana and Abdul, who continue to be the subject of the neighbours' suspicion and hostility – thus perhaps suggesting the *more enduring* grasp that 'the moral pressure to identify with a small cluster of privatized normal identities' (Berlant 1997: 192) has on racialised and/or immigrant families.

Thus, while both portrayals do, indeed, confirm the previous chapter's argument in relation to the 'family stability' discourse – with its close discursive proximity to particular, normative, family forms – many moments in both also allow for different kinds of readings to emerge of the practices and relations of care and intimacy between the characters. As above, it is the figurative economies of austerity that position the texts as part of the discursive networks that condemn benefit-receiving families as always already unstable, and therefore as undeserving of state assistance – also functioning, perhaps, to hide some of the more critical ways in which both portrayals challenge notions of benefit recipients as irresponsible, needy, and dependent. Tellingly, Daniel is the only character in either text that, at least initially, refuses to take part in these reciprocal networks of care, clinging onto his belief that the state *will* provide care and support in

¹⁴² This part of the chapter's analysis and argument, particularly in relation to the challenges *I, Daniel Blake*'s narratives present to discursive framings of dependence and the universality of the welfare state, arose from, and is indebted to, discussions and joint work with my colleague Jacqueline Gibbs. See Gibbs and Lehtonen (2019) for more detail.

his time of need. The other characters – Katie and China, as well as many of the James Turner Street residents – take to these practices of friendly and neighbourly care more readily, perhaps revealing that their faith in the reciprocity of the state was *never* certain in the way that Daniel's was. After all, a blind faith in the universality of welfare provisions is an attitude historically afforded to few, and, thus, perhaps it is no surprise that the lone mothers and racialised and/or immigrant populations depicted in the two texts already *know* the conditionality of state support – as well as the need to supplement it with their own relational care practices.

Race, Immigration, and Mothers of the Nation

The opening scene of the second episode of *Benefits Street* introduces White Dee as Irish, while her son Gerrard 'has a Jamaican father, but on this road that's nothing special.' The voiceover continues, 'many of the 78 occupied homes have someone born overseas in them.' The episode in general focuses on issues around immigration and multiculturalism, positioning James Turner Street as a long-established multiracial and multicultural community – as well as introducing a number of new entrants to the street, such as recently arrived Romanian families and workers, and a group of Gypsies/Travellers who have set up camp in a small park at the end of the road. White Dee comments on the new arrivals with sharp insight: 'times change innit, you know back in the, you know, fifties and sixties, it was the Jamaicans and the Irish that were classed as the immigrants, it's just now it's the Polish and Romanians.' She goes on to discuss the Gypsies/Travellers with Fungi, joking that since she is Irish her family are 'probably related to half of them.' The episode – the one with the clearest theme out of the six episodes in the first season – thus, firmly establishes James Turner Street as a – both culturally and racially – *mixed* space. Further, it is in this episode's representations that the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' figure is most clearly established as co-constituted by the concurrent processes of racialisation and sexualisation.

While the vast majority of the storylines of *Benefits Street* focus on benefits, or at least on the lives of people who are on benefits – as suggested

by the series' title – the second episode features many that have very little, or nothing at all, to do with social welfare. The newly arrived Romanians include a group of 14 men who share a house on the street. The men were initially promised well-paid work: they 'came with hopes of the good life but found only slave labour', the voiceover states, explaining that the men's boss is keeping their passports. The group are also yet to receive any financial compensation for their labour. After reporting their boss to the police, the group splits, fearing retribution from the boss's men – some return home, some head to London, and one or two remain in Birmingham. Many in the group express their desire to just work and send money to their families, a few even specifically highlighting their disinterest in charity or state handouts. While this storyline does follow the lives of people who live on James Turner Street, the geographical focal point of the series, it is otherwise rather far removed from the world of social welfare. This discursive jump from 'benefits street' to 'immigration street',¹⁴³ thus, creates a strong connection between the world of benefits and that of immigration, suggesting that they are commonly found adjacent to, or intermingled with, each other – and, importantly, in this case perhaps both geographically and culturally.

In contrast to the Romanians, the Gypsies/Travellers who have moved their caravans to the park at the end of the street are never interviewed or even properly seen on camera – their arrival is framed entirely through the residents' (mostly negative) reactions to, and discussions of, them. While most of the episode's storylines focus broadly on immigration – as in the story of the newly arrived Romanians, as well as that of Ana and Abdul, discussed above – the Gypsies/Travellers are not framed *either* as benefit recipients (which they, of course, may be) *or* as immigrants (which they are less likely to be). Instead, members of this community – who tend to already be 'widely perceived as workless, parasitical welfare dependants, a drain on local and state resources who cheat the system' (Tyler 2013: 133) – are discursively positioned as more generic cultural

¹⁴³ The name of the suggested, but subsequently abandoned, follow-up series by *Love Productions*, the company that produced *Benefits Street*.

and/or racialised *outsiders* or *intruders* to the street, feared and despised by many of the residents, exemplified by Becky's suggestion that her neighbours should 'close their windows.' A similar statement by Fungi – 'they're tramps' – is ambiguously placed in the episode's narrative and could refer either to the Gypsies/Travellers or to the Romanians. This ambiguity perfectly illustrates the episode's continuous movement between narratives about immigration, on the one hand, and references to racial and cultural difference, on the other; in this example the newly arrived – non-British – Romanians without work permits are placed in close discursive association with the – most likely British – Gypsies/Travellers. Parts of the episode also explicitly focus on the *multiracial* nature of the James Turner Street community, with the voiceover highlighting the prevalence of mixed-race residents – such as in the comment made about White Dee's son Gerrard mentioned at the beginning of this section.

The discursive proximity between benefits, immigration, and racial difference established in this episode is completed with a final representational move. In addition to the frequent instances throughout the series in which the camera lingers on piles of rubbish lining the streets, in this episode references to – both literal and figurative – *dirt* are multiplied. Amongst the James Turner residents' negative reactions to the Gypsies/Travellers now occupying the small plot of land at the end of the street is Becky's statement that they are 'dirty', as well as being untrustworthy and (potential) criminals. Some members of the Romanian family that has recently moved onto the street have started a scrap metal business and now spend their days looking for bits of metal they can sell on. We see members of the family rummaging through bags of rubbish, to the dismay of some of the street's other residents, who claim that the family are even taking things not meant for the bin – creating a discursive connection between criminality and 'dirtiness.' The street's rubbish collection day arrives, but because the bin bags left on the street have been opened and foraged through, the rubbish collection trucks refuse to take them. Some residents are furious both at the Romanians for the part they played in causing the problem and at the council for refusing to pick up the bags. In

the end, the residents decide to take action themselves, re-bagging the rubbish and defiantly arranging them in a wall the middle of the road, until we eventually see the trucks return to dismantle the barricade of bin bags.

What the overwhelming concentration on dirt and rubbish as key elements in the narratives of the this episode does, is to establish a close discursive connection between immigration and racialisation with *dirt* or *dirtiness* – and, thus, the narrative proximity between benefits, immigration, and racial difference is completed by the addition of ‘dirt.’ As the residents express their worries and anxieties about the new entrants and their ‘dirtiness’, they, at the same time, fight for the literal dirt to be removed by the council. Their – openly expressed – disgust for the rubbish left on the street, is juxtaposed with their – poorly concealed – disgust for the newly arrived Romanian immigrants and/or the ‘dirty’ Gypsies/Travellers. Here, as Imogen Tyler argues, ‘a *physical* experience of disgust slides into contempt and judgements of value’ (2013: 22, emphasis mine) to create *moral* disgust. Further, through the establishment of the discursive proximity between benefits, immigration, and racialisation, on the one hand, and ‘dirt’, on the other, the poor, working-class/‘workless’ neighbourhood of James Turner Street also appears as a space through which not only immigrants and immigration, but also racial difference, ‘mixing’, and finally ‘dirt’, enter the UK.¹⁴⁴ Here the James Turner Street residents’ battle to remove the rubbish from ‘their’ street also comes to stand in for an imagined national struggle to keep immigrants – and, in particular, racially undesirable ones – out. The discursive comingling of dirt, racial difference, immigration, and ‘benefit scroungers’, thus, also establishes a discursive connection between the porous borders of the country as a whole, and its working-class/‘workless’ spaces as *particularly porous*.

Of course the positioning of *Benefits Street* as a kind of discursive *border zone*, through which all manner of undesirable elements enter the UK, can only emerge in the programme’s framing if we expect the UK to be a

¹⁴⁴ These emphases and narrative proximities echo Stoler’s (2002) discussion of the colonial fears about the *proximity* of poor white populations to colonised ones – and specifically about the degeneracy and criminality that would occur in white populations as a result of ‘racial mixing.’

racially and culturally homogenous – white and British – space in the first place. In other words, the episode's narrative focus on the *exceptionality* of James Turner Street in terms of how commonly its residents are either themselves from abroad or descended from someone from abroad, only makes sense if we assume that the rest of the country's population is *not* like this. Thus, and as the previous chapter suggested, rather than the white working-class populations of James Turner Street *themselves* being racialised through the programme's discursive emphasis on the *proximity* between benefit-receiving, racialised, and immigrant populations, instead this emphasis highlights something important about the 'boundary-making strategies within whiteness that both police and produce its racial authority and coherence' (Wiegman 2012: 185). The programme's linking of immigration and racial difference, on the one hand, and the residents' *cleansing* of the street of undesirable elements, on the other, thus, not only echoes Paul Gilroy's argument that 'intrusions by immigrants, incompatible blacks and fascinating, threatening strangers have come to symbolise all the difficulties involved in the country's grudging modernisation' (1992: xxvi). It also suggests that poor, working-class, and benefit-receiving *white* populations feature centrally in anxieties about the imagined threats that racial 'mixing' and immigration pose to the nation both symbolically and economically.

These discursive connections, furthermore, have specific consequences for those who are seen as playing particularly key roles in potentially making spaces such as James Turner more susceptible to the many threats to the imagined cultural and racial homogeneity of the nation. The often-invoked positioning of women and particularly of mothers as guardians or reproducers of the boundaries of national and racial groups, discussed in Chapter 3, is here deployed in the service of a narrative that ties together anxieties about immigration and loss of imagined racial homogeneity, with worries about working-class/'workless' spaces as under particular threat of cultural and racial infiltration. Poor, working-class – and here, implicitly, white British – women are, thus, discursively foregrounded as potential 'transmitters' of racial and cultural difference into the space of

the nation, and their reproductive decisions also, consequently, come to be intimately tied together with the imagined collective fate of the nation. Against this discursive background, *Benefits Street*'s open and detailed discussion of the racial composition of many of the families living on the street; its recurring explicit references to siblings with different fathers; and, in particular, the narrative's lingering on White Dee's children not only having different fathers but also Gerrard's father being foreign; can be read as deployments of this discourse.

While immigration and racial difference do not feature as explicitly in *I, Daniel Blake*, it does reproduce a few similar discursive references. Daniel's neighbour China is one of the very few non-white characters in the film, and the scenes in which he features are all either about his relationship with Daniel, as mentioned above, or about his new illegal venture smuggling brand sneakers from China. Named in a way that curiously equates his identity with his criminal activity – although it is unclear whether this is, indeed, the *origin* of his name – China, thus, and similarly to Katie, finds other ways to supplement the income he gets from his poorly paid job and the welfare system, choosing not to place all his faith either in the crumbling welfare state or in the promises of proper paid employment. The film also – although much less explicitly – acknowledges that Katie's children Dylan and Daisy not only have different fathers, but also that Daisy's father is not white. This acknowledgement could appear either as an innocent detail in a realistic representation of a liberal, multicultural, and multiracial Britain, or as a discursive nod to the framings in which the reproductive decisions of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' are seen as potentially threatening to the racial homogeneity of the nation – depending on the viewer's discursive baggage. In the case of both Daisy and China, then, *I, Daniel Blake* makes minor visual or discursive allusions to some of the same discursive framings *Benefits Street* reproduces more explicitly, associating blackness with criminality and the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' mum with her 'gaggle of mixed race children', as Tyler (2008: 26) argues in relation to the 'chav mum' figuration.

Given the increasing prevalence of a racial politics that pits white working-class populations *against* racial and ethnic minorities in a battle for both cultural and economic resources (Sveinsson 2009), the discursive framings of *I, Daniel Blake* certainly *allow for* the more sinister reading of the roles of Daisy and China to emerge. Thus, the ‘benefit recipient/scrounger’ figure is, at least to a degree, established in the discursive landscapes of both texts as either racialised or an immigrant herself, or as culturally or geographically *proximate* to racialisation and immigration – and thus with the potential to threaten the coherence of both whiteness and the nation. However, while *I, Daniel Blake* is mostly populated by white British characters, *Benefits Street* overall portrays a much more mixed environment. The narratives explored above are complemented by others, such as the street’s ‘50p man’ Smoggy, who goes from house to house selling small amounts of household essentials for fifty pence, and S.B., an aspiring model and mother of two – both black British. While the overall narrative of the series, indeed, overwhelmingly reproduces various common negative discursive tropes about immigration and racial difference, as discussed above, these are not the only discursive connotations made in relation to racialisation and immigration. Thus, it is certainly also *possible* to view *Benefits Street* through a more benign discursive lens of cultural and racial heterogeneity – exemplified by White Dee’s statement in episode 2: ‘we’ve got Jamaican, we’ve got Irish, we’ve got English, and we’ve got Polish. It’s like one great big family.’

Cultural Poverty and Family Responsibility

I am not sure whether the Prime Minister is a follower of ‘*Benefits Street*’ on Channel 4, but if he is, he will know that, sadly, there is a street like that in every constituency in the land. (Simon Hart, Conservative MP for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire in HC Deb 2014c: c851)

Like many Members, I have watched at least two episodes of ‘*Benefits Street*.’ When a Sure Start worker worked alongside some parents, it was incredibly inspiring to see how empowered the mother was. [--] The way to do that is not by punishing them

or withdrawing benefits, but by getting alongside people, showing them that we are on their side and understand, and giving them the necessary skills. I very much hope that the children from that family will grow up happier, healthier and able to contribute to society, and that they will not need that kind of support when they are parents. Investment in the early days is so important and can make such a difference to children's outcomes. (Fiona O'Donnell, Labour MP for East Lothian in HC Deb 2014d: cols 341WH-342WH)

As this chapter has argued, *Benefits Street* relies on various discourses of *exceptionality* to make the 'benefit recipients/scroungers' it represents legible as such, especially in its depiction of James Turner Street as an exceptionally 'workless', 'dirty', and racially and culturally mixed space. This exceptionality functions to set James Turner and other spaces like it – such as council estates, traditional working-class neighbourhoods, and Gypsy/Traveller sites – apart from the rest of the UK, which can then, in comparison, appear as culturally and racially much more homogenous, orderly, and 'proper' – or in other words, as embodying white middle-class morality and values. On the other hand, the spatially restricted focus of the show also operates to position the street as a *cultural* model version of 'benefits Britain' as a whole. By representing the welfare-claiming population through a geographically limited prism, *Benefits Street*, thus, also offers a suggestive illustration of what is going on under the surface *everywhere*, signalling the *culturally* distinct nature of benefit-receiving populations from the rest. MP Simon Hart's quote above usefully highlights both discursive frameworks: firstly, by suggesting that the exceptionality of James Turner Street is replicated in many geographical locations throughout the country and, secondly, by hinting at the potentially omnipresent nature of benefit-claiming 'lifestyle' or 'culture.' *Benefits Street*, thus, also reproduces the 'cultural poverty' discourse, examined in the previous chapter, in narrative form, as well as discursively ties it together with narratives about *appropriate* parenting and reproduction, as I discuss below.

'On James Turner Street, kids are everywhere. Many are raised by single parents', states the voiceover in the third episode of *Benefits Street*. In

the opening sequence, as well as at various points throughout the series, we see children running around on the street, playing in piles of rubbish. After one such montage, the voiceover exclaims: 'kids learn a lot about life from the grown-ups of James Turner Street', as the camera pans to Fungi and his friends drinking and being rowdy while interacting with a group of kids. Later on we see Fungi playing with Becky and Mark's son Callum, as well as giving White Dee's son Gerrard some tips on causing trouble. These scenes position Fungi – who the series introduces as 'a recovering drug addict' – *both* as a friendly, familiar, and almost paternal presence to some of the street's children *and* as a stereotypical 'bad influence' on them. Although he is close to many of his neighbours' kids, he is not allowed to see his own children. He 'has held onto some mementos of their time together', the voiceover explains, and the viewers see a box full of postcards, toys, trinkets, and drawings. On the walls of Fungi's living room are notes he has put up for himself: a newspaper cutting that states 'we must think of kids, not ourselves' and a hand-written note that reads 'no more smoking or u wont ave kids ever xmas.'

In episode 4, an appointment for Fungi to see one of his sons has been set up. In the morning of the appointment, White Dee goes to bang on Fungi's front door but he does not wake up, making her concerned that he will not go – although it is not clear whether this would be by choice or by accident. Eventually he wakes up but finds out that the adoptive parents have called the meeting off, without explaining why. Towards the end of the episode Fungi goes to see Donna, the mother of his oldest child, and his 'first love.' On the way back from her house he talks about how upset he is that he is no longer part of the family and says, 'all that just for a fucking bit of heroin.' These heart-breaking scenes stand in contrast to Fungi's frequently rowdy behaviour, emphasising the price he has to pay now for mistakes he has made in the past. Earlier in episode 1 we are told that Fungi was abused as a kid and has been on Diazepam since he was 16 years old. He has also been to prison many times – a 'second home' to some of the James Turner Street residents, explains the voiceover. Fungi's complex story appears to somewhat conform to the 'cultural poverty' discourse examined in the

previous chapter, whereby the abuse and dysfunctionality he experienced as a child has led to him being at risk of passing on the wrong kinds of cultural values to his own children. Although in his case the state has intervened and, thus, prevented him from doing so, he is, nonetheless, depicted as adding to the *general dysfunctionality* of the street, and thereby creating a negative environment for its many children.

In episode 3 'Fungi is entertaining his drinking buddies, and it clashes with an important day for Mark and Becky', who are preparing to welcome a Sure Start worker coming to advise them on parenting their kids. As the adviser arrives, Mark is outside with the kids and some of the street's other residents, one of who shows the crowd and the camera his stab wound. The adviser quizzes Becky and Mark on whether they commonly sit outside with the children and says, 'sometimes exposing children to that type of environment does influence them as well, doesn't it', after which we see another resident drunkenly swearing at a group of kids. These short scenes, together with Fungi's close but ambiguous relationship with Callum, function to reframe Becky and Mark's struggle to discipline Callum as an attempt to parent him in a *culturally* appropriate manner. The Sure Start worker's disapproval of, and concern for, the street's influences on Callum and Casey signals the inappropriateness of James Turner Street's environment and culture for raising children. In this way, the narrative begins with Becky and Mark facing set of *practical* parenting issues, to then morph into a pursuit for the correct parenting *culture* and *values* – a pursuit stacked against the street's many bad influences. The 'cultural poverty' argument is, thus, reflected in Becky and Mark's positioning as facing the choice either to reflect appropriate (middle-class) cultural values in their parenting, or to pass the street's cultural dysfunctions onto their children.

In *I, Daniel Blake*, it is Daniel who stands in for the paternalistic state, embodied by the Sure Start adviser in *Benefits Street*. His assistance around the house and with the kids helps stabilise Katie's situation, but also seems to push her along on a path of appropriate parenting. He brings the children handmade wooden toys and gets Dylan – who is both hyperactive and isolated, both misbehaves and withdraws – engaged in woodcarving. Daisy

points out that ‘no one listens to’ him, ‘so why should he listen to them?’ – but it is Daniel’s grandfatherly touch, introducing him to the gentle but masculine activity of woodcarving, that helps him concentrate like he never has before. Daniel’s support is presented through a framework of middle-class parenting that combines elements of warmth with discipline, as the previous chapter discussed, and, thus, mirrors the assistance Becky and Mark receive from the Sure Start employee. Both parents are helped along by stand-ins for the paternalistic state, coaxing the poor, working-class parents to take on the responsibility of making sure that their children are parented appropriately – and that they, consequently, grow up to be ‘able to contribute to society’, as MP Fiona O’Donnell underlines in the quote included in the beginning of this section. Without these interventions, the parents would risk passing on their own cultural dysfunctions to their children, preventing their future success.

Katie’s vague allusion to Dylan’s father further accentuates the discourse of ‘cultural poverty’, as well as specifically the importance of *early intervention*. As mentioned, she only refers to him once during the film – as a ‘bit of trouble’ – crediting him with causing her and her children to live in a homeless hostel, and the audience are left to fill in the gaps of the narrative. The potentially violent masculinity that Katie and her kids have escaped from is mirrored in the storyline of S.B. in episode 4 of *Benefits Street*. She left the violent father of her oldest child Terrell two years ago, and now a couple from her church, Delroy and his wife, are helping her home-school Terrell. Delroy calls Terrell ‘a difficult boy’ and thinks that the trauma that he has experienced as a result of his father’s violent behaviour has ‘left an imprint on his mind.’ The struggles of Katie and S.B. mirror each other: both are positioned as responsible for making sure that these ‘difficult boys’ overcome the imprints left on their brains by their violent fathers. In order to ensure that the boys’ cultural as well as cognitive development proceeds appropriately – without perpetuating the dysfunctional and violent behavioural norms of their fathers – both S.B. and Katie attempt to replace the destructive masculinity of the boys’ fathers with the more gentle and paternalistic middle-class masculinity embodied by Delroy and Daniel.

Delroy underscores this reading with his statement that, in helping with Terrell's education, they 'have to try and let him know that not all fathers are the same.'

In this framing, the misbehaviour and unruliness of Dylan and Terrell becomes an early sign of the 'faulty brain architecture' that bad parenting can result in, according to the recent surge in arguments concerning the importance of early intervention for children's *cognitive* development, as discussed in the previous chapter. Here the focus is, thus, on improving the minutiae of parenting *practice*, as opposed to the material conditions in which poor families live. The 'benefit recipient/scrounger' figure is positioned as responsible for her children's emotional, cognitive, and cultural development – a responsibility that also ensures that the future imaginaries of the nation are protected from the dysfunctional cultures of poor, working-class populations. These framings of 'cultural poverty' offer a straightforward vision of intergenerational cultural transmission, without paying attention to the complex ways in which the traumas of racism and capitalism *can* live on in collective cultural memory, affecting subsequent generations, as others (Cvetkovich 2003; Gordon 1997) have suggested. While *I, Daniel Blake*'s embeddedness in the figurative economies of austerity that blame poor parents for the potential cultural transmission of poverty to their children is certainly more subtle than that of *Benefits Street*, both reproduce enough of these discursive framings to be legible within them. While this chapter has so far focused on specific aspects of the austerity discourses that are sustained – albeit to different degrees – in the two media texts' representations, I now move on to pulling these different threads together in a discussion of the varied media and political responses to both.

The Authenticity of the 'Benefit Recipient/Scrounger'

Amongst the many media responses to *I, Daniel Blake* was Young's (2016) scathing review of the film in the *Daily Mail*. The core of his critique is directed at what he perceives as the film's *inauthenticity*: 'I'm no expert on the welfare system, but several aspects of *I, Daniel Blake* don't ring true'

(*ibid.*). He picks the film's depiction of the welfare system apart bit by bit and is particularly critical of its portrayal of benefit recipients:

The two protagonists are a far cry from the scroungers on Channel 4's *Benefits Street*, who I accept aren't representative of all welfare recipients. But Loach has erred in the opposite direction. For a filmmaker who styles himself a 'social realist', he has an absurdly romantic view of benefit claimants. Daniel is a model citizen. At no point do we see him drinking, smoking, gambling, or even watching television. No, he is a welfare claimant as imagined by a member of the upper-middle class metropolitan elite. He listens to Radio 4, likes classical music and makes wooden toys for children — the kind of over-priced 'artisanal' tat sold in 'alternative' toyshops in Islington, where Loach lives. Katie, too, is a far cry from White Dee, the irresponsible character in *Benefits Street*. (*ibid.*)

The benchmark of authenticity against which Young assesses the depiction of welfare claimants in *I, Daniel Blake* is their representation in *Benefits Street*. Juxtaposing Katie with White Dee, Young suggests that Loach's portrayal is too far removed from reality to elicit sympathy, let alone to be convincing. Mark Steel (2016) responds to his review in *The Independent*, specifically taking him up on the charge of inauthenticity. Steel, in turn, goes on to blame *Benefits Street* for inauthenticity, likening Young's complaint that the *I, Daniel Blake* characters are a 'far cry' from those on *Benefits Street*, to complaining that David Attenborough's films about orangutans are misleading because they do not resemble the ones in *The Jungle Book*.

This back and forth debate about the *truthfulness* of the representations of *I, Daniel Blake* is mirrored in the well-publicised debate between Work and Pensions Secretary Damian Green, and both Ken Loach himself and Leader of the Opposition Jeremy Corbyn. In a response to a parliamentary question, Green stated that the film 'is a work of fiction and not a documentary. It bears no relation to the modern benefits system. As I understand it, it is monstrously unfair to jobcentre staff' (HC Deb 2016c: c677). Loach responded in a comment to the Press Association: 'if they don't know what they are doing to people they are incompetent and shouldn't be in Government. If they do know what they are doing then they are not fit to

be in Government' (Ferguson 2016). Corbyn, in turn, took a dig at Green the following day during Prime Minister's Questions:

Could I recommend that the Prime Minister support British cinema, and takes herself along to a cinema to see a Palme d'Or-winning film, 'I, Daniel Blake'? While she is doing so, perhaps she could take the Work and Pensions Secretary with her, because he described the film as 'monstrously unfair' and then went on to admit that he had never seen it, so he has obviously got a very fair sense of judgment on this. (HC Deb 2016d: cols 881-882)

These debates are reflected in many other references to the film in parliamentary debates and discussions. Opposition MPs have praised the film for its 'cold and sobering view of the reality that so many people are experiencing' (MP Mhairi Black in HC Deb 2016a: c304) and for epitomising 'what is wrong with the social security system' (MP Debbie Abrahams in HC Deb 2016f: c296), while Conservative MPs and Government Ministers have argued the film is grossly inaccurate.¹⁴⁵ Parliamentary references to *Benefits Street*, in turn, are almost a mirror image of ones to *I, Daniel Blake*. Conservative commentators and politicians have used its representations as justifications for further welfare cuts and conditionality, as in the examples included throughout the above discussion, whereas opposition MPs have tended to dismiss the series' portrayal as both untrue and unfair.¹⁴⁶

The documentary status of *Benefits Street* has been frequently presented as proof of the authenticity of its representations, whereas, conversely, many have suggested that *I, Daniel Blake's* status as a fiction film undermines the claims of those who see it as an accurate representation. Despite their different genres, discussions around both texts have, thus, tended to revolve around their *truthfulness*. I have presented these debates in some detail because they highlight in an interesting way what is at stake in the various and varied responses to these two texts. The austerity agenda in many ways *depends on* the reproduction of negative portrayals of undeserving 'benefit scroungers', whereas critics of this agenda tend to rely

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, comments by Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery Caroline Nokes (HC Deb 2016b: c417).

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, comments by MP Diane Abbott (HC Deb 2014e: cols 389-390); MP John MacDonnell (HC Deb 2014b: cols 671-672); and MP Peter Dowd (HC Deb 2016e: c495WH).

on depicting benefit recipients in such a way that their need for state assistance appears to be no fault of their own, thus positioning them as clearly deserving – with both sides claiming a greater degree of authenticity for their purported representation.

However, as I have tried to show throughout this chapter, the representations sustained in these two texts are not quite as easily polarised or oppositional as these debates suggest. On the one hand, while *Benefits Street* tends to be known as exemplary ‘poverty porn’ that demonises benefit claimants, the series’ discursive framings do not always support such a reading, with many scenes and character arcs quite actively challenging such a view. On the other hand, although *I, Daniel Blake* is generally viewed as a very sympathetic representation of benefit recipients, illustrating the *systemic* failings evident in the UK’s welfare system instead, the film’s framings frequently also draw on the same discursive tropes as *Benefits Street* does. Despite their many differences, the two texts, thus, participate in the same *figurative economies* – albeit to differing degrees. This argument is not intended to criticise Ken Loach’s directorial decisions, or to suggest that my analysis somehow reveals *I, Daniel Blake* to be a portrayal just as demonising as *Benefits Street*, but rather to indicate that the texts’ participation in the same figurative economies is *necessary* – in order for their representations of benefit recipients to be legible as such.

My use of the somewhat awkward phrase ‘benefit scrounger/recipient’ throughout the above analysis is, thus, intended to illustrate the close discursive proximity of imaginaries of deservingness and undeservingness. In my framing, the deserving benefit recipient is only recognisable as such if she either aspires to have a paid job, a ‘stable’ family, and to parent her children according to appropriate (middle-class) cultural norms, *or* if she has already met these conditions of deservingness in the past. The undeserving scrounger is, in contrast, only legible as such if she is has no such aspirations or no such past. Consequently, the former is also always in danger of slipping into the frame of the latter, if the viewer is not quite convinced that her future aspirations or past achievements do enough to make her appear as deserving. Further, in both texts it is the characters

that are marked as different from the norm – whether through processes of racialisation or sexualisation, or because of family form – who tend to always be at a *higher* risk of being read as a scrounger instead of a deserving and respectable benefit recipient. Thus, it is Daniel – the older white male – who appears as the most obviously wronged, and therefore as the most clearly deserving, subject in all the representations discussed above, whereas the single mothers, racialised and immigrant characters, and those who engage in criminal or morally dubious activities, are always a step behind.

Neither text, furthermore, *challenges* the centrality of the discourses of ‘worklessness’, ‘family stability’, ‘cultural poverty’, and the positioning of immigration and racial difference or ‘mixing’ as a threat, to imaginaries of social welfare. Consequently, they also leave intact the *unimaginability* of alternative visions of the ‘good life.’ Desiring anything other than to gain paid employment, to attain the (hetero)normative family ideal, and to parent one’s children according to established middle-class norms, remains outside of the discursive frame for all wishing to appear as deserving subjects – thus also invisibilising, for instance, the informal unpaid care work that many of the characters discussed above do. These discourses, thus, carry significant representational power, and neither media text examined here provides an exception to their recurrent reproduction within the figurative economies of austerity politics. Further, as I argue centrally in the next and final section of this chapter, that the legibility of the ‘benefit recipient/scrounger’ figuration depends so centrally on the reproduction of these – frequently racialised and sexualised – austerity discourses has significant consequences for the possibility of this figuration appearing as a normatively intelligible *political* subjectivity.

The Political Subjectivities of Austerity

I, Daniel Blake presents its narrative climax when Daniel’s frustration at the welfare system reaches its peak. Angry and fearful for his future, Daniel has another altercation at the Jobcentre, after which he storms out and spray paints ‘I, Daniel Blake demand my appeal date before I starve’ on the

Jobcentre wall. Daniel sits beneath his political battle cry as passers-by express surprise and sympathy for his act, but eventually he is taken away by the police and given a formal warning. After this narrative peak, Daniel becomes withdrawn and isolated but reconciles with Katie just before his WCA appeal date finally arrives. At the appeal, after an initial promising meeting with his welfare rights adviser, Daniel becomes anxious and goes to the bathroom to calm himself down. A short while later, someone runs out of the bathroom shouting for an ambulance – Katie panics and runs in to find Daniel collapsed on the floor from another heart attack. The film ends with his ‘pauper’s funeral’ – the cheapest early morning slot – where Katie reads Daniel’s appeal speech as the eulogy:

I am not a client, a customer, nor a service user. I am not a shirker, a scrounger, a beggar, nor a thief. I’m not a National Insurance Number or a blip on the screen. I paid my dues, never a penny short and proud to do so. I don’t tug the forelock, but look my neighbour in the eye, and help him if I can. I don’t accept or seek charity. My name is Daniel Blake. I am a man, not a dog. As such I demand my rights. I demand you treat me with respect. I, Daniel Blake, am a citizen, nothing more and nothing less.

As Katie speaks his words at the funeral, Daniel gets to make one final claim for his needs to be recognised by the state. Challenging his positioning as a dependent, irresponsible subject, Daniel reminds us that he is *entitled* to support and respect from the state. In this final reminder that he is a citizen – nothing more and nothing less – who *demand*s his rights, and does not ‘accept or seek charity’, the film ends with a rather singular or simplistic claim to justice.

Daniel’s claims to *citizenship*, and to having *paid his dues*, as the legitimate bases for his entitlement to the state’s care and support, position *him* at the centre of both the film’s narrative arc and its imaginaries of deservingness. As an older white male with a long and legitimate work history in manual labour, but now unable to work due to an illness that is no fault of his own, Daniel appears as a clear victim of the draconian welfare system that has caused his plight and suffering throughout the film. There is nothing ambivalent about the life he has lived, and his right to care and

support from the state was *never* uncertain. Although his storyline ends in death, the film gives him the chance to explicitly enact resistance and to exercise his political voice twice: firstly, when he spray paints his battle cry on the wall of the Jobcentre for everyone to see and, secondly, when Katie reads his appeal speech at his funeral. Daniel, thus, embodies a legible political subjectivity even after his death, eliciting a sympathetic affective response from those who witness it – in this case *both* the by-passers and funeral guests in the film *and* many of the film's audiences. Contrastingly, this kind of recognisable and legitimate political subjectivity is not available to sexualised Katie or racialised China in the film's narrative framing – nor is it available to the residents of James Turner Street. As if to further accentuate this point, Katie's positionality is marginalised or negated one last time in the final moments of the film, as Daniel's prewritten words are substituted for anything she might have to say at the end of her journey.

These emotive scenes, thus, confirm the film's depiction of Daniel as an ideal working-class and benefit-claiming subject. They also highlight and foreground a nostalgic attachment to the proper working classes of the past. While Daniel's past work history positions him as a clearly deserving benefit recipient, the patchy or non-existent work histories – and degrees of attachment to having one in the first place – of other characters in both texts position them as always at risk of being read as undeserving scroungers instead. My point here is not to suggest that Daniel is somehow too squeaky clean to be a benefits claimant, like Young does in his review, but, instead, to highlight how *our* – the film's viewers' – attachment to him as a legitimate and deserving welfare claimant possibly hinges on his portrayal as *differentially entitled* to other characters in the film. Our nostalgic attachment to an image of a clear-cut and legitimate working-class subjectivity of the past, thus, also plays a part in the affective imaginaries that saw the film labelled as 'the film that made everyone cry' (Yuan 2016). *I, Daniel Blake* ends with a claim to the imaginary of a clearly deserving citizen, also potentially positioning the viewer in a differential relationship to the film's other characters – as well as prising open the question that

haunts both texts under examination here: does the injustice of the austerity framework only become legible when a subject like Daniel is centred in it?

Would the film have the same effect – or affect – if it was Katie or China who was centralised in its narrative structure? Would a disabled benefits claimant who has never worked, a migrant worker with no work permit, or a racialised single mother on a zero hours contract in the care industry, elicit the same kinds of responses from the film's viewers? And further, would these characters have access to the same kind of visible and recognisable political voice and action Daniel does? These questions point, firstly, at the difficulty of sustaining an identification with, and a *political* attachment to, class categories in an era of flexibilisation and precarisation of labour, as many others (Gibson-Graham 1996; Skeggs and Wood 2011; Standing 2011; Weeks 2011) have suggested. Secondly, they indicate that this nostalgic attachment – apart from its role in turning cinemagoers into 'sobbing wrecks' (Yuan 2016) – also helps sustain the working class/'underclass' distinction. While the former becomes the target of our sympathetic sobbing, the latter remains the subject of much more ambivalent attachments in the figurative economies of austerity. The ambiguous relationship that both Katie and China have to imaginaries of deservingness, thus, risks not only rendering them less deserving, but also potentially making these racialised and sexualised characters (only) legible as members of a criminal and immoral – and, importantly, *apolitical* – underclass.

In the film Daniel is, thus, surrounded by people who *do* accept and seek charity and who have not, perhaps, always 'paid their dues.' The breaking down of Katie and Daniel's close relationship is in the film's narrative structure directly linked to his judgement of her choice to participate in sex work. Similarly, Daniel disapproves of China's choice to engage in criminal activity to supplement his income. Both China and Katie's responses to their dire financial situations – both criminal, and both subject to Daniel's judgement – stand in stark contrast to Daniel's political response – a vocalised and visible act of resistance. While Daniel waits alone in his flat, having sold all of his possessions to pay his bills, Katie and China, it

could be argued, continue on their chosen paths of sex work and crime without qualms. For them, the possibility of embodying a normatively intelligible political subjectivity is discursively foreclosed by the positioning of both of their storylines within a framework of – both sexual and criminal – dysfunctionality and immorality. The dire discursive position of these sexualised and racialised characters, perhaps, on the one hand, highlights not only the limited *narrative* possibilities, but also the limited *political* possibilities, that are available for the precarious working classes of neoliberalising austerity politics. On the other hand, however, perhaps Katie and China's choices could also be viewed as a kind of a *refusal* – a refusal to remain in the dichotomous framework of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' that they are both otherwise discursively stuck in.

Tina Campt's analysis of images of black colonial subjects focuses on quotidian practices 'honed by the dispossessed in the struggle to create possibility within the constraints of everyday life' (2017: 4). These everyday practices do not materialise as resistance in easily recognisable ways but, instead, refuse the very terms of the dispossession that makes them necessary in the first place. Perhaps Katie and China's activities could be read as examples of such quotidian practices of survival – despite being labelled as both criminal and morally questionable by Daniel's judgement. After all, it is Katie's entry into sex work that enables her to buy her children new school shoes and, therefore, to mitigate at least some of the effects of the state practices that have led to her dire financial situation. Similarly, China's smuggling business allows him not only to supplement the measly income he receives from his zero hours job, but also potentially to steer clear of the dehumanising ethos of the welfare system. Both take rather *creative* action to survive, refusing to accept the conditions of precarity and dispossession engendered by their engagements with state institutions. Both also actively refuse the terms to which they have been reduced by the state – or 'undermine the categories of the dominant' in Campt's (ibid.: 32) language – perhaps, therefore also challenging the argument made by many (Bhattacharyya 2015; Gilbert 2011) that increasing precarity and the

concomitant need to focus on survival alone ensures that dissent is automatically suppressed within neoliberalising conditions.¹⁴⁷

This reframing of Katie and China's criminal activities as creative and nimble practices of both survival and refusal also helps present the choices of the James Turner Street residents who have turned to crime in a different light. While the series' inclusion of scenes of shoplifting resulted in significant criticism (Ofcom 2014), is the residents' choice to engage in criminal activity in itself that surprising – given the proliferation of state practices, such as sanctioning, that can make one destitute? In their seminal work on the politics of mugging, Stuart Hall et al. position crime both as a means of *survival* and as a *refusal* of the traditional role of the 'reserve army of labour' (1978: 370). In somewhat similar terms to Campt's analysis – although she does not explicitly discuss crime – they consider the possibility that crime can be a refusal of the *structure* of the system that has consigned the black worker to the position of unskilled labourer. While Hall and his colleagues do not consider crime itself to be a political act, they argue that in some circumstances it can provide a class consciousness, or give 'expression to the experience of permanent exclusion' (*ibid.*: 391). My intention here is not to claim that the exclusion and precarity experienced by benefit claimants is comparable to the exclusion and dispossession experienced by black subjects within a logic of racial subordination, which both Campt and Hall et al. are concerned with. Instead, these scholars' works are useful here specifically because they allow Katie and China's choices, as well as potentially those of the *Benefits Street* residents, to become *legible in political terms*.

Chris Jones and Tony Novak (1999) argue that the demonisation of the 'underclass' has historically fulfilled an essential economic and political purpose. The separation of the respectable *working* class from the immoral

¹⁴⁷ At the same time though, we may think of Katie and China as 'reluctant subjects' in the sense suggested by Gibson-Graham (2006). Their research participants 'could not easily identify with the alternative subject positions it availed. Most of them got up in the morning wanting a job – and if not wanting one, feeling they needed one – rather than an alternative economy' (*ibid.*: xxxvi). Thus, my argument here is not about Katie and China's *intentions*, or an explicit *desire* to 'undermine the categories of the dominant', but rather, that their actions, in themselves, constitute a refusal.

and criminal 'residuum' is necessary especially at times when poverty grows, to dissuade large-scale working-class identification and mobilisation. The political purpose of the 'underclass'/working class distinction is reproduced over and over again in the figurative economies of austerity, consigning the populations that do not have access to the *proper* working class status of the past to the position of the undeserving, criminal, and dysfunctional 'underclass' instead. My discussion, thus, points at some of the ways in which distinctions are made not only between deserving and undeserving welfare claimants, but also between the legitimate working class and the wretched 'underclass.' The separation of the latter from the former is based on the *cultural* markers of respectability and normativity, which, to a significant degree, depend on processes of sexualisation and racialisation. Further, 'respectability' is, here, seen as bound to an idealised image of the legitimate and proper working class of the past – as well as to particular imaginaries of what counts as political action, and *who* as a political subject, such that the 'underclass', consequently, appears through an *a priori* depoliticised discursive framing.

Thus, Katie and China's everyday practices of refusal provide us with a way not only of challenging these imaginaries of (a)politicisation, but also of imagining alternative regimes of entitlement and citizenship, given the continuous erosion of reciprocal state-citizen relationships within neoliberalising austerity politics. When the state unilaterally withdraws support from (some of) its subjects, perhaps 'paying one's dues' could, in fact, consist of the many alternative care relations and practices that the characters in both representations establish with one another. When 'entitlement' loses its meaning because of the continuous depletion of state services and support, perhaps it could be reconfigured to mean entitlement to participate in various alternative practices of survival instead. Indeed, 'demanding respect' from a state that no longer respects you or your needs, could amount to refusing the very terms of this crumbling relationship, like Katie, China, and many of the *Benefits Street* characters arguably do. This reading, thus, also suggests a different way of reading Daniel's political acts – which, after all, are not met with recognition by the state. His defiant act of

writing on the Jobcentre wall – the narrative climax of the film – appears much less significant, even ironic, due to the patronising tone of the police officers who caution him – revealing, ultimately, the *futility* of Daniel's continued belief in the care and reciprocity of, and his demand of respect from, a state that, decidedly, does *not* care.

Kathi Weeks calls for a 'politics of and against work' to supplement or replace traditional class-based politics that require identification with particular, pre-established, class categories and argues that such a politics 'has the potential to expand the terrain of class struggle to include actors well beyond that classic figure of traditional class politics, the industrial proletariat' (2011: 17). J. K. Gibson-Graham, similarly, call for a class politics that

might not necessarily invoke the emancipatory agency of a mass collective subject unified around a set of shared 'interests' but could arise out of momentary and partial identifications between subjects constituted at the intersection of very different class and nonclass processes and positions. (1996: 53-54)

My discussion of the politics of figuration present in both *I, Daniel Blake* and *Benefits Street* has, hopefully, illuminated some of the tensions precisely between that classic politicised figure of the industrial proletariat – embodied by Daniel – and the many members of the contemporary working classes who do not quite as easily sit within this traditional conception of class politics. The potentiality evident in both representations for those who are not as readable as part of the classic legitimate working class to appear as undeserving members of the criminal and dysfunctional 'underclass' instead, thus, also masks some of the ways in which these characters are already engaged not only in various forms of work, but also in *a politics of refusal* in relation to work. Thus, while they grapple with everyday precarity, they also maintain 'an active commitment to the everyday labor of creating an alternative future' (Campt 2017: 116).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined two media texts – *I, Daniel Blake* and *Benefits Street* – that both created a significant amount of media and political

discussion and debate upon their release, as well as that exemplify 'austerity TV', in that their representations of benefit recipients are central to the figurative economies of austerity politics. Beginning with an investigation into the ways in which the common austerity discourses examined in the previous chapter are reproduced or challenged within both texts, I focused on discourses of 'worklessness', 'family stability', and 'cultural poverty', as well as highlighted the ways in which immigration and racial difference tend to be presented as threats to the racial and cultural homogeneity of the nation. The figuration of the 'benefit recipient/scrounger' was shown to depend on these discourses and, consequently, on processes of sexualisation and racialisation, to such an extent that her legibility within the figurative economies of austerity depends on these processes. Imaginaries of deservingness are here tied to a temporal logic that suggests that a benefit recipient can only appear as clearly deserving if she desires paid employment, a 'stable' and normative family, and to pass the correct cultural values on to her children – or if she has already attained these conditions in the past. Imaginaries of *undeservingness*, in contrast, suggest other kinds of desires, as well as an uneasy attachment to, and an identification with, the figure of the classic, legitimate, and politicised working class of the past.

Central to this chapter's analysis has been the question of whether we *need* the fantasy of Daniel Blake precisely because of the commonness of less sympathetic representations of benefit recipients, or whether we gravitate towards these nostalgic and fantasmatic representations because we recognise them and, consequently, see them as more worthy than others. I have argued that the many characters, and particularly the racialised and sexualised ones, whose desires do not conform to these established imaginaries of deservingness are rendered illegible and/or illegitimate through our sustained attachments to the more recognisable ones – who are also, consequently, easier to sympathise with. Further, this process also masks the politics of refusal that already underpin many of these non-conforming desires. In the next chapter I discuss state processes and policies that are frequently characterised as examples of neoliberal penalisation and reframe them as *intimate disruptions* instead, arguing

centrally that these disruptions materialise as a consequence of the fragmented and complex manner in which the neoliberalisation of policy implementation and service delivery tends to proceed. Continuing both this and the previous chapters' discussions of the political imaginaries, action, and subjectivities available within the context of austerity politics, I go on to argue that another kind of politics of refusal is also possible within the processes by which neoliberalising state power is being dispersed and fragmented.

Intimate Disruptions:

Austerity Politics and Spaces for Political Action

Chapter 5

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Introduction

In 2014 Titina Nzolameso's five children were placed into three different foster families, and care proceedings were begun (*Nzolameso v Westminster City Council [Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and another intervening]* [2015] UKSC 22, [2015] PTSR 549). The decision to place Nzolameso's children into care was not the result of an assessment of her parenting abilities, or of the environment in which she was raising her children, but instead followed a two-year legal battle she had engaged in with her local council, City of Westminster. In 2012 Nzolameso had been evicted from her home in Westminster because she could no longer afford her rent after facing a significant reduction in her housing benefit, following the implementation of the changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates earlier that year (discussed below). After she refused the council's offer of social housing in Milton Keynes because of its distance from her social and medical support networks in Westminster, the council initially placed her and her family in bed and breakfast accommodation in the neighbouring borough (Kensington and Chelsea) while the case was

reviewed by the council and then heard by two different courts. However, the council eventually decided to stop providing her with temporary accommodation after her court appeals failed. Since the children's services department could not accommodate the whole family together, Nzolameso was left with no other option but to request her children be placed into care, while she herself found temporary accommodation with friends.

The many and varied disruptions to Nzolameso and her children's private and intimate lives appear not so much as the calculated and intentional actions of a coherent state actor, or even necessarily as the intended consequences of particular policies, but instead as the inevitable *effects* of the processes by which decision making proceeded in her case – as *(by-)products* of the decision-making process itself, as it were. This chapter focuses on such *intimate disruptions* that emerge as a consequence of three different recent welfare and housing policies and practices: the Bedroom Tax – officially the Removal of the Spare-Room Subsidy (RSRS); the increasing practice whereby Local Authorities house their social housing clients outside of the LA area; and 'workfare' or 'back to work' schemes and benefit sanctions. These policies (and others like them) are often discussed as examples of the increasing conditionality in, or *penalisation* of, social welfare in neoliberal or neoliberalising states, as Chapter 1 detailed. However, what tends to be labelled 'penalty' is in many cases less about straightforward punishment – or, indeed, about any kind of intentional action by a coherent, agentic state. As I argue throughout this chapter, these policies and practices, firstly, entail naturalised and implicit judgements about the value of intimacy and care, and about what constitutes a liveable life. Secondly, the resulting intimate disruptions in the everyday lives of the affected individuals emerge from, and are implicit in, the processes by which state power is being reconfigured under neoliberalising austerity politics.

Although some of the policies discussed here do also control and manage the intimate sphere rather *explicitly* (think for example of the Bedroom Tax and its explicit regulation of who – of what age, gender, and familial relation – has the right to their own bedroom), I am here more interested in how the processes by which these policies are implemented,

and these practices executed, *themselves* produce disruptions in intimate lives. In other words, my analysis pertains primarily to how the operation of state power through its supposed devolution to local actors and private corporations – developments frequently considered part and parcel of the processes of neoliberalisation as Chapter 1 discussed – engender various and varied disruptions to the intimate. As will be shown below, in particular these disruptions commonly arise in the *gaps* and *distance* between national policy aims on the one hand; and the local resources and abilities available for realising them on the other. Thus, my analysis also, in part, responds to Nicola Lacey's call for 'mid-level institutional account[s]' of neoliberalism to 'fill the explanatory space between the macro account [--] and the micro examples' (2010: 781). Finally, following the preceding chapter's examination of how the gendered and sexualised discourses of austerity materialise at the levels of figuration and subjectification, this chapter also points at their salience at the level of service delivery.

This chapter is divided into six parts, the first one of which further introduces and contextualises the three policies and practices examined in it, as well as briefly discusses its methodological approach. The following three sections each examine a different aspect of the ways in which disruptions are engendered in the intimate sphere by the operation of neoliberalising state power, utilising three key UK Supreme Court judgements as their source materials. The first one focuses on the Bedroom Tax cases and discusses the *judgements of value* inherent in the policy's implementation, whereby different kinds of intimate relations, practices, and needs are deemed less or more valuable. The second uses the concept of *liveable lives* to argue that, as well as various judgements of value, these policies and practices entail judgements about what constitutes a liveable (intimate) life, discussing the Supreme Court judgement related to the increasing practice of out-of-council housing placements. The third section examines the Supreme Court judgement on workfare and benefit sanctions, arguing that these state practices materialise as significant *everyday disruptions* in the lives of affected individuals. The second to last section pulls these various threads together to argue that the intimate disruptions

analysed throughout the chapter constitute a significant reconfiguration of the public/private divide in two separate but related ways. The final section investigates whether any space for political action emerges in the gaps and spaces opened up by the diffuse operation of state power that neoliberalisation entails, asking the question: where can we locate *the political* within this reframed understanding of neoliberal penalisation?

Intimate Disruptions: Method and Materials

The main source materials of this chapter consist of UK Supreme Court judgements on three high profile cases relating to the Bedroom Tax, out-of-council housing placements, and workfare schemes. The legal judgements are here used as evidence of the decision-making processes and structures relevant to each case. Thus, my aim is not to assess the validity of the Court's decision making, or to argue that the Supreme Court itself is implicated in penalising welfare. Rather, these documents are treated as rich, descriptive accounts of the 'statework' (Clarke 2004: 121) involved in each case. The first judgement (*R [Carmichael and Rourke] and Others v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* [2016] UKSC 58, [2016] 1 WLR 4550) deals with seven separate cases regarding the Bedroom Tax – also known as the 'Under-Occupancy Penalty' or the 'Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.' The second judgement (*Nzolameso*) concerns the recently popularised practice, of London councils in particular, of moving social housing clients out of the geographical council area, mostly to other parts of London but also considerably further. The third judgement (*R [Reilly] v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* [2013] UKSC 68, [2014] AC 453) relates to back-to-work or workfare schemes and benefit sanctions.

The Bedroom Tax was introduced as part of the *Welfare Reform Act 2012* and aims to force public sector tenants with bedrooms that are deemed 'spare' to move to more suitably sized properties. Originally labelled the 'Under-Occupancy Penalty', quickly dubbed the 'Bedroom Tax' in media discourse, and eventually changed to the 'Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy' (RSRS) in official parlance, the tax only applies to council and housing association tenants, as housing benefit for people living in the

private rented sector is calculated according to different rules (see below). Unless the tenant is able to move to a smaller property, having one or two bedrooms more than the permitted allowance results in a 14 or 25 per cent reduction in housing benefit, respectively. The permitted allowance for a household is one bedroom for each adult couple, any other person over 16 years of age, two children of the same sex under 16, two children under 10 regardless of their sex, a child with disabilities who cannot share a bedroom due to the disability,¹⁴⁸ and any other child. Exemptions to the policy include foster carers, adult children who are in the Armed Forces, as well as some people with disabilities who require overnight care (Shelter 2017). The Supreme Court judges dismissed five of the seven claims brought to the Court, while two that related to differences in the ways in which adults and children with disabilities were affected by the policy were successful (*Carmichael*).

The council practice of moving social housing clients out of the LA area is not prescribed by any particular UK-wide policy but has arisen in recent years due to multiple factors. Firstly, the introduction of a national cap for Local Housing Allowance rates in 2011 together with other changes to housing benefit rates,¹⁴⁹ as well as the introduction of the Benefit Cap and the Bedroom Tax, have resulted in many social housing clients residing in privately rented accommodation no longer being able to afford their rent – particularly in London and other high-rent areas. Secondly, the significant increases in private rents caused by the housing crisis, together with the considerable decreases in central government funding to councils since 2010, again particularly in low income areas and in London (Innes and Tetlow 2015), have together led to many councils finding it increasingly difficult to house all the homeless households who meet the criteria for

¹⁴⁸ This allowance was expanded to include adult couples that cannot share a bedroom due to disability as a result of the Supreme Court case under discussion here.

¹⁴⁹ Particularly the changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates introduced as part of the 2010 emergency budget. Previously LHA rates were based on the median average of a sample of local rents. Since 2011, LHA rates are instead set as the 30th percentile on local rental prices. See Gov.UK (2016a) and Wilson et al. (2016) for more information.

statutory homelessness in their area.¹⁵⁰ Finally, the *Localism Act 2011* made it easier for councils to discharge their duty to a homeless person by offering them accommodation in the private rented sector.¹⁵¹ Altogether these factors have resulted in many LAs increasingly using out-of-council housing placements as a solution to tackling homelessness in their areas. The Supreme Court ruling (*Nzolameso*) requires that LAs provide more detailed evidence of having adequately considered both the circumstances of the homeless person or family and the housing available within the council area before making the assessment that it is not ‘reasonably practicable’ to house them within the LA, as well as that they give more information regarding the decision to the client.

‘Workfare’ refers to governmental policies that require individuals to undertake some form of work or training in return for their benefits, most notably Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and Universal Credit (UC). Both the workfare schemes and the work and training placements themselves are provided by a mixture of public, private, and charity organisations, and up to 14 different schemes have been in operation since 2010.¹⁵² In many of the schemes welfare claimants are required to work in for-profit organisations such as Asda and Poundland,

¹⁵⁰ When an individual or household approaches a local council for housing, the council’s first task is to assess whether they meet the criteria for statutory homelessness, or in other words, whether the council owes them the homelessness duty. In order for the council to be responsible for housing the individual or household, they have to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless, and fall within a specified priority need group. This includes households with dependent children, pregnant women, and people with mental illnesses or physical disabilities, among others (Gov.UK 2018a). Importantly, the practice under examination here only pertains to people and households who are accepted by councils either as statutory homeless, in which case the council has a statutory duty to find accommodation for the household; or as particularly vulnerable despite not meeting the criteria for statutory homelessness, in which case councils tend to offer temporary accommodation for a limited period (usually 28 days). While this chapter focuses specifically on the practice of Local Authorities offering out-of-council housing to statutory homeless households, the various homelessness rules and policies no doubt also have implications for the intimate lives of those *not* considered statutory homeless.

¹⁵¹ Previously a homeless person had the right to refuse an offer of accommodation in the private rented sector and opt instead for remaining in temporary accommodation and staying on the council’s social housing waiting list. Since the Localism Act, refusing an offer of privately rented accommodation counts as becoming ‘intentionally homeless’ and results in the council no longer having a duty to house the person or family. See Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) for more information.

¹⁵² See (Boycott Workfare 2018a) for a list of all the programmes that have been active during the Coalition Government era.

and the placement of claimants is often subcontracted to corporations such as Ingeus, an American provider owned by Deloitte that runs one of the biggest workfare schemes. Workfare policies are related to benefit sanctions in that failure to participate in a training or employment scheme is the most frequently occurring ‘failure’ that results in a sanction (Beatty et al. 2015) – meaning the stopping of benefit payments for a period of time between four weeks and three years. Although both benefit sanctions and workfare schemes were already in use under the previous administration, their use significantly increased during the Coalition Government era. Similarly to the case discussed above, the Supreme Court case related to workfare (*Reilly*) ruled that the Government had not provided sufficient information to the claimants either on the placements themselves, or in regards to the consequences of refusing a placement.

Because the primary concern of this chapter is the intimate disruptions that materialise as a result of changes and shifts in the operation and reach of state power – and not, for example, the operation of the UK Supreme Court – I use these materials as *sources of evidence*. Rather than focus on them as legal documents as such, I instead highlight their value as rich descriptive accounts of the decision-making practices and structures through which state power functions within the intimate or private sphere. While in Chapter 3 I examined policy texts, for the purposes of this chapter an analysis of the *intention* of particular policy frameworks would be insufficient, since very few of the intimate disruptions examined here derive directly from the letter of the policies. Although some of them may, in fact, correspond exactly with the intention of the policy makers who devised the policies, the question of intent is not central to the analysis that follows. My examination, thus, also illuminates a key tension identified by Cris Shore and Susan Wright, who argue that ‘on closer examination [--] it becomes unclear what constitutes “a policy”’ (1997: 4). Is it the written documents produced by governmental actors and institutions, outlining the aims and intentions of particular policy frameworks? Or is it the processes of implementation or service delivery themselves, or even the experiences that people have with street-level bureaucrats?

In this chapter I focus on the latter two specifically to make the argument that it is in the fragmented processes of policy implementation and service delivery that these policies and practices materialise as significant disruptions in intimate lives, rather than *necessarily* in their stated aims. As Chapter 1 highlighted, policies frequently transform and mutate during the process of implementation due to, for instance, path dependency and the interactions between street-level bureaucrats and the people accessing a particular service. Thus, policy is not just straightforwardly 'implemented', but rather, subject to interpretation at various points, for example by individual front-line workers who consequently 're-create official policy' in their work (Wright 2002: 236). Be it Jobcentre Employment Officers, council Housing Officers, or the employees of a subcontracted private provider, street-level bureaucrats are, consequently, involved in policy-making processes – and arguably as centrally as top-level politicians. Thus, I argue that the actions of these street-level bureaucrats may, in fact, constitute *statework*, thus highlighting that the trends towards privatisation and localisation within neoliberalising states do not entail as much a *quantitative* transfer of power from the central state to other actors, as a *qualitative* change in their relationships, as I argued in Chapter 1. For example, the employees of private corporations involved in making recommendations for benefit sanctioning are here not seen as taking over the state's functions – and the process therefore leading to a *decrease* in the state's power, and a corresponding *increase* in that of the private corporation. Rather, they are viewed as being centrally involved in statework, albeit in a partial and fragmented manner. The analysis in this chapter, thus, also investigates the changing nature of state power in the context of neoliberalising austerity politics.

Melissa Autumn White argues, following Zygmunt Bauman (2007), that 'what renders bureaucracy effective is its capacity to *mask* rather than obliterate moral concerns' (2014: 89, emphasis in the original). In this chapter I investigate some such moral concerns that are hidden by, but nonetheless central to, processes of policy implementation and service delivery. These processes entail significant value judgements about intimate

relations, practices, and spaces – or, in other words, about the *conditions necessary* for an intimate life, or what makes a *liveable life* – despite being seemingly not at all concerned with the regulation of sexual or family life. They are involved in arbitrating between necessary and unnecessary, or proper and improper, intimacies, as well as consequently in rendering certain intimacies visible and others invisible. By adopting the conceptual frame of ‘intimate disruptions’ I am able to, firstly, highlight the *range* of intimate relations, practices, and spaces that are potentially disrupted by the policies examined in this chapter, as well as to, secondly, circumvent the issue of intent. Thus, my methodological approach in this chapter has been chosen specifically because it allows me to centre the disruptions themselves – which may or may not be contradictory to the language and intentions of actual policies, but which nonetheless emerge or materialise as a consequence of particular policy implementation processes. Finally, as I argue towards the end of the chapter, the ubiquity of such intimate disruptions suggests that changes and shifts in the public/private divide are central to processes of neoliberalisation and austerity – with significant consequences for how political action against them might be conceived.

Judgements of Value

In all seven cases brought to the Supreme Court in 2016, the affected household’s rent had been covered in full by housing benefit prior to the introduction of the Bedroom Tax – after which each household was assessed as having one or two ‘spare’ rooms and faced a reduction in their housing benefit as a result.¹⁵³ Some of the households were already in receipt of a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) – discussed in more detail below – at the time of the Supreme Court case. The Supreme Court dismissed five of the cases, three of which are briefly introduced here: those of ‘A’, JD, and James Daly. ‘A’ lives in a three-bedroom house with her son, who was born as the result of a rape by a man she had been in a brief relationship with. He had been ‘exceptionally violent’ (*Carmichael*: 4577) and made serious threats

¹⁵³ The information in this and the following two sections regarding the Supreme Court judgements derives from *Carmichael*, *Nzolameso*, and *Reilly*, respectively, unless otherwise specified.

against her, as a result of which her property had been specially adapted under a sanctuary scheme to provide a higher level of security, and she also receives on-going security monitoring. JD is the full-time carer for their adult daughter, AD, who has disabilities, and they live together in a specially constructed three-bedroom property. James Daly's son, Rian, who also has disabilities, is cared for by his separated father and mother in separate houses, for three and four days out of weeks, respectively. Rian has a room at each of the parents' houses, and it was the one at his father's house that was considered 'spare.' The Supreme Court dismissed these three cases because it saw that 'cases of need for reasons unconnected with the size of the property should be dealt with through the DHP scheme' (*ibid.*: 4570).¹⁵⁴

The Supreme Court, conversely, ruled in favour of two of the seven cases brought to it in 2016: those of Mrs Carmichael and the Rutherfords. Mrs Carmichael needs various pieces of equipment related to her disabilities in her bedroom, meaning that there is not enough space for her husband – who is also her full-time carer – to share the same bed or bedroom. Susan Rutherford and her partner are full-time carers for her grandson, Warren, who also has disabilities. Respite care is provided by carers who stay in the Rutherfords' 'spare' room two nights a week. The Supreme Court judgement discusses these two cases in relation to the exemptions already provided in the Bedroom Tax policy for children who cannot share a bedroom with a sibling due to the need to have disability-related equipment in their bedroom and for adults who need an extra bedroom for overnight carers. The Court agreed that the policy's differential treatment of adults and children with disabilities (who need either the sole use of a bedroom because of disability-related equipment, or an extra room for overnight respite carers) is not reasonable and, therefore, accepted that the needs of these claimants should be met through exemptions in the Bedroom Tax policy itself, rather than through DHPs.

¹⁵⁴ The other two dismissed cases were that of Richard Rourke, who stores equipment related to his and his stepdaughter's disabilities in their third bedroom; and Mervyn Drage, who has mental health difficulties, including obsessive-compulsive disorder, and lives on his own in a three-bedroom flat. He does not sleep in any of his bedrooms, as they are all full of papers that he has accumulated.

The Bedroom Tax cases under discussion here are not unusual. Firstly, according to the Government's own impact assessment, nearly two-thirds of the households affected by Bedroom Tax have an adult with a disability in them.¹⁵⁵ Secondly, the chronic lack of smaller social sector dwellings in the UK has meant that most households affected by the policy have had to make do with reduced benefits, rather than being able to find and move to more suitably sized accommodations – the stated aim of the policy. Figures published by *The Independent* in August 2013 suggest that as many as 96 per cent of those affected by the Bedroom Tax were, in fact, unable to move due to the lack of suitable properties in their area and were, consequently, effectively 'trapped' in their 'too large' homes (Dugan 2013). According to the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) interim report on the Bedroom Tax (DWP 2014b), only 4.5 per cent of affected claimants had downsized to a smaller property within the social rented sector, and a further 1.4 per cent had moved to the private rented sector within the first six months of implementation. Some claimants had looked for more work to cover the shortfall in rent, but very few were willing to take in a lodger – two of the suggestions made by the DWP for people affected by the new policy.

Juxtaposing the cases of James Daly and the Rutherfords illustrates the different ways in which care and intimate relations played – or, indeed, did *not* play – a part in the Court's decisions. In both cases a child with significant disabilities is cared for by more than one person. The Rutherfords' 'spare' room is used by respite carers two nights a week; James Daly's 'spare' room is used by his son, Rian, three nights a week. As explained above, the Rutherfords won their case, whereas Daly's case was one of the five that were dismissed. The Supreme Court agreed that while it may be appropriate for the council to continue paying Daly's rent in full – thereby ensuring that the family can stay in their current accommodations – at the same time it was not unreasonable for the shortfall in rent to be covered by a DHP, rather than the case resulting in an actual exemption to the Bedroom Tax policy. The Court's decision was based on the notion that

¹⁵⁵ Children with disabilities were not included in the impact assessment, so the total number of affected households with someone with disabilities in them is likely to be even higher (Full Fact 2013).

James Daly's need for the 'spare' room had nothing to do with his son's disabilities, and, therefore, he had no grounds for challenging the lower court's judgement on equality grounds. Notwithstanding the Court's assessment that the decision was not in violation of the appellant's human rights, the decision, nonetheless, provides a striking contrast to that of the Rutherfords.

Since the shortfall caused to James Daly's rent by the Bedroom Tax was already covered by a DHP prior to the beginning of the Supreme Court proceedings, the family suffered no *financial* consequences – or, at least, immediate ones – for being subject to the Bedroom Tax, or for losing the Court case. It is important to note, however, that DHPs are paid as a central government grant to the council and then allocated to individual households at the council's discretion. Decisions about DHPs are made based on an assessment of the urgency and significance of the varying and multiple needs of the many individuals and households affected by the Bedroom Tax and other housing benefit changes in an LA area. They are usually also only paid for a limited time period, and individuals in receipt of one are expected to make long-term changes to their finances (Shelter 2016). Since DHPs are not guaranteed by a law or regulation, but are instead dependent on council funds and a relative assessment of the needs of everyone who applies for one, they do not provide the same kind of stability and assurance as full housing benefit does – even taking into account that the stability provided by housing benefit can itself be rather limited. According to the DWP (2014b), some Local Authorities struggled to make long-term plans for the resource precisely because of the uncertainty of both future demand and the future size and availability of the fund. Moreover, 56 per cent of housing benefit claimants who had not applied for a DHP surveyed for the report said they were not aware of the fund, bringing into question the ability of the scheme to adequately support those in danger of becoming homeless.

Further, and importantly, the discursive and regulatory implications of, on the one hand, being exempt from the Bedroom Tax and therefore receiving one's housing benefit in full; and on the other hand, facing a reduction in one's housing benefit because of a 'spare' bedroom and then

receiving a DHP to cover the reduction, are also different. In the former case the state's agencies accept that the room in question is not 'spare' but necessary – and in the Rutherfords' case, specifically, necessary for meeting Warren's disability-related needs. In the latter case, the room is, indeed, deemed 'spare', but the relevant state agencies decide to cover the affected household's rent regardless – perhaps for reasons of strong need, a particular and recognisable vulnerability, or possibly because not to award a DHP would overall end up being more costly to the council. The Rutherfords were allowed an extra bedroom for the use of respite carers, without whom they would not have been able to take care of their grandson Warren at home. Rian Daly was cared for by both of his parents but at different addresses and, therefore, only allowed one room *between them*, without either parent facing a reduction in their housing benefit. In the former, the extra room allowed the grandparents to continue providing care to Warren at home, whereas in the latter, the extra room allowed both parents to continue sharing the responsibility of caring for their son – as well as ensured that Rian's relationships with both of his parents continued.

While the Supreme Court did not explicitly adjudicate on the basis of James Daly's relationship with his son being *less valuable* than that of the Rutherfords' grandson to his respite carers (or to his grandparents), in practice and implicitly, these relationships, nonetheless, appear to carry strikingly differential value. Although she examines immigration regimes, Ala Sirriyeh's argument that immigration decisions can involve 'a hierarchical ordering of the value of [--] relationship[s]' (2015: 236) is relevant here. In this case, similarly, Warren's relationship to both his grandparents and his respite carers *materialised* as differentially valuable to that between James Daly and his son. Without the extra room, the Rutherfords would have most likely had to place Warren in residential care; whereas Rian would have lost out on having a relationship with both of his parents, and the parents on being able to share the responsibility of parenting. Rian's relationship with his father was, thus, *implicitly* not seen as equally valuable as that of the Rutherfords to their grandson – or at least not valuable *enough* for the state to take action to protect and enable it. The

processes of implementation, thus, produce their own hierarchies of value, which may be different than the values explicitly expressed in policy language – as they are in this case.

Although James Daly's situation indicates that at least some councils are willing to take action through the DHP scheme to enable relationships such as that between him and his son, nonetheless, in practice separated parents living in social housing are strongly discouraged from sharing caring and parenting responsibilities evenly as a – perhaps unintended – consequence of the Bedroom Tax. Had Rian been cared for by his father alone, the Bedroom Tax regulations would have allowed not only a room for him, but also possibly another room for respite carers, as in the case of the Rutherfords. However, since James was only partially responsible for Rian's care, even just a room for Rian himself was considered 'spare.' The policy's regulatory framework holds no space for considering *James* as fulfilling the role of a respite carer, providing much needed respite to Rian's *mother*. This effect of the policy, thus, also sits in stark contrast to the austerity discourses examined in Chapter 3, which tend to place a strong emphasis on the importance of two-parent families, and specifically on that of *fathering*. In this case, the relationship between James Daly and his son was seen as *unnecessary* for meeting Rian's disability-related needs, and, consequently, it was precisely this relationship that also ended up being the most disrupted by the policy's effects.

Similarly to the Daly and Rutherfords cases, a contrast could be made between couples who are unable to share a bedroom due to one partner's need for disability-related equipment in their bedroom – covered by the Bedroom Tax exemptions, as highlighted by the Supreme Court case of Carmichael – and couples who are unable or unwilling to share a bedroom for any other reason – whether varying sleep patterns or arrangements, or simply differing preferences – not accommodated by the Bedroom Tax regulations. Along similar lines, the policy allows children not to share a bedroom with a sibling if they are over 16 years of age, or over ten years of age and of a different sex than the sibling, or if they, again similarly to Carmichael, require disability-related equipment in their bedroom – but not

for any other reason. In these situations, intimate relationships with certain family members – a wife, a husband, or a sibling – are *imposed* on social housing residents by the policy's effects. The regulations related to siblings are, further, based on naturalised assumptions about the nature of both sibling relationships and childhood itself. Children under the age of ten are seen through a *desexualised* lens, and, therefore, it is considered appropriate for them to share a bedroom.¹⁵⁶ In contrast, siblings of a different sex between the ages of ten and 16 are (heteronormatively) sexualised and, consequently, it is assumed that it would be improper for them to share a bedroom. In the case of both couples and siblings, then, the affected individuals 'have to perform a normative (read "heteronormative"), intelligible story of intimacy' (White 2014: 78), and the intimacies of those who do not or cannot perform such normative intimacies are subject to implicit judgement.

The cases of A and JD provide a final illustrative example. Both claimants live in specially constructed or adapted properties: JD's property due to the disabilities of their adult daughter, AD; and A's under a 'sanctuary scheme' – accommodation that has been adapted to provide protection for women at high risk of domestic violence. In both cases the Court agreed that while it may be appropriate for the relevant councils to continue paying the claimants' rents in full through the DHP scheme, at the same time neither claimant required the *number* of bedrooms they presently had, as the special modifications made to their properties were unrelated to the number of rooms. However, similarly to the other five cases heard by the Supreme Court, JD and A lived in their 'over-sized' properties not because of greed or a desire for 'spare' rooms, but because of the lack of smaller properties in their area. The properties had been allocated to them by the council and then modified, at great financial cost to the council, to meet their exact requirements. Additionally, in A's case the sanctuary scheme adaptations were made specifically so that she could continue to live safely in her

¹⁵⁶ On childhood, and specifically on the role of sexualisation in determining the boundaries of childhood, see Breslow (2016).

current accommodations *without* having to move – a stated aim of the sanctuary scheme in general.

The demand that A move to a more suitably sized property, made through the application of the Bedroom Tax to her situation, thus, appears in stark contrast to her specified need *not* to move – a need both recognised and met by the council through the sanctuary scheme. The disruptions that the policy engendered in A's intimate life materialise in the *literal impossibility* of the council meeting these competing needs and demands at the same time. These two cases, thus, highlight a curious discrepancy between an LA decision that allocates a particular property to a household and a national policy that then deems one (or more) of the rooms in that property 'spare' and, consequently, demands that the household pays for the privilege of having the extra room(s). In other words, a household's original need for housing – met by the council following an assessment of, firstly, all the available social housing options in their area and, secondly, the needs of everyone on the council's social housing waiting list at the time – appears here *in contradiction* with the Bedroom Tax and its demand that a need for housing should not be *over*-met. The policy, thus, not only significantly compromises LA ability to make decisions about housing allocation based on their knowledge about the conditions of supply and demand for social housing in their area. It also renders any central government claim about increasing localisation in decision making meaningless, thus also confirming Jamie Peck's argument that neoliberalising 'devolution' tends to involve various changes in 'regulatory responsibilities, administrative capacities, financial control, political power and so forth' (2001: 447) – rather than simply a *relocation* of the implementation of a particular policy from the national to the local level.¹⁵⁷

As these cases show, therefore, it is specifically in the *discrepancy* or *gap* between the national policy – with its idealised aim that the UK's social housing stock should exactly match the needs of the country's social housing claimants – and the (in)ability of most LAs to realise this aim, that the

¹⁵⁷ See also Chapter 1, and Featherstone et al.'s (2012) conceptualisation of 'austerity localism.'

Bedroom Tax emerges as a punitive policy. In other words, the penalty of the policy emerges from the *impossibility* of its successful implementation according to its stated aims. This reading also highlights that in the context of the Bedroom Tax *fairness* in social housing allocation is framed purely around the financial value of the *number of rooms* a particular property has, rather than around the suitability of the accommodations otherwise – more likely to be the council’s priority. The cases of both A and JD illustrate that the overwhelming focus on the number of rooms functions to shift the discursive focus away, firstly, from the financial value of other things, such as special adaptations made to properties either under the sanctuary scheme or for disability-related reasons and, secondly, from the *value of care and intimate relations* and towards *monetary* or *financial* value alone. Since the same range of peculiar intimate disruptions would not have been engendered by a focus on square footage, for instance,¹⁵⁸ this shift towards emphasising the financial cost of the under- or over-use of *rooms*, further, works to heighten the policy’s effects on the intimate sphere, naturalising the implicit judgements of different kinds of intimacies, needs, and relationships embedded in it.

While the original reasoning for the introduction of the Bedroom Tax had to do with better utilisation of the UK’s social housing stock – and with the potential for making savings on social housing – it is unclear whether the policy has been a financial success. Although exact figures are not available, due to the combined effect of the lack of suitable social housing stock, particularly of one-bedroom properties; the increasing number of exemptions to the policy; and the significant overspending on DHPs in some areas, it is unlikely that the overall savings made by the policy are significant. However, the policy has resulted in at least some of the cost of the underuse of the UK’s social housing stock being *shifted* from central government to Local Authorities, housing associations, and individual households. DWP (2016) figures show that 41 per cent of Local Authorities (152 out of 367) spent more on DHPs than was allocated to them by the

¹⁵⁸ Although of course it is possible that such a focus would have engendered its own, peculiar, range of intimate disruptions.

Government between April 2015 and March 2016, topping up the government grant from their own funds. Further, as tenants are increasingly unwilling to accept properties deemed to have too many rooms, housing associations and other large landlords are finding it increasingly difficult to utilise all of their housing stock (Criddle 2015). As my discussion in the final section of this chapter illustrates, it is landlords who have borne the cost of repurposing their housing stock to better match the needs of social housing tenants.

Thus, rather than necessarily resulting in *overall* savings – or, indeed, in better utilisation of the UK’s social housing stock – perhaps one of the policy’s key values for the central government can, instead, be found in the various *shifts in value* themselves. These include both the discursive shift towards financial value and the shift by which the cost of the poor fit between the UK’s social housing stock and the needs of its social housing clients – the consequence of decades of lack of investment in social housing – has been moved onto the affected individuals themselves, as well as onto the Local Authorities that owe them the homelessness duty. As well as its value for the governments, it is within these shifts that the policy’s punitiveness can be found, as it is precisely its *over-emphasis* on particular kinds of financial value, and *under-emphasis* on both other kinds of financial value and the value of certain intimate and care relations, that leads to the materialisation of various intimate disruptions in affected individuals’ lives. The emphasis on the number of rooms and, concomitantly, on intimacy, thus, works as an *alibi* for the violent disruptions that these emphases engender. As the above discussion has illustrated, the strange effects that the Bedroom Tax (can) have on intimate lives are, further, sometimes explicitly contradictory to policy – thus revealing the meaninglessness of policy rhetoric in the face of the disruptive implications of policy implementation. Yvette Taylor’s argument that ‘intimate relationships are brought into being, and negated, in interaction with institutional frameworks and through intersecting legal and material (im)possibilities’ (2013: 18) is, thus, broadly confirmed by the Bedroom Tax and its peculiar, but violent, effects on the intimate lives of those affected.

Liveable Lives

As briefly highlighted above, in November 2012 Titina Nzolameso, a 51-year-old single mother with multiple long-standing health issues ranging from HIV to diabetes, and with five children aged between eight and 14, was evicted from her home in Westminster, London. The rent for her privately-rented house had been covered by housing benefit until the implementation of the changes to Local Housing Allowance rates earlier that year, resulting in a significant reduction in her housing benefit. She applied to Westminster council for housing under the 1996 homelessness provisions, and her and her children were placed in temporary accommodation in the neighbouring borough while she waited for a decision. The council accepted their duty to house Nzolameso and her children and offered her a privately rented five-bedroom house in Bletchley, Milton Keynes. Nzolameso rejected the offer on several grounds: it was too far away from her friends and support network; she did not know anyone in Milton Keynes; she had several long-term health issues and would have to change GPs; her children would have to change schools; and she had lived in Westminster for a long time. Her refusal resulted in the council immediately notifying her that its duty to house her had ended. Nzolameso then proceeded to appeal the decision with the council, as well as eventually with both the county court and the Court of Appeal, but all three confirmed the council's original decision. In February 2014 the council ceased to provide her and her children with temporary accommodation, and since the children's services department refused to accommodate the whole family together, she requested the department to provide accommodation just for her children. The children were separated between three different foster families and care proceedings begun.

Titina Nzolameso's case is not unique: in October 2013 48 per cent of all temporary accommodation units in the City of Westminster were out of borough (*Nzolameso*). Nationally, in September 2014 a quarter of all temporary accommodation for homeless people was provided in a different council area – an increase of 29 per cent since September 2013 – a great majority of which (93 per cent) were from London boroughs (DCLG 2014:

10). Furthermore, according to figures obtained by *The Independent* (2015), between July 2011 and July 2014 London Councils moved almost 50,000 households out of borough, with over 2,700 families moved out of the capital entirely. In a large proportion of these cases the receiving council was not notified of the family's move into the new council area. These figures clearly illustrate the flow of homeless families from inner to outer London and out of London altogether, prompting many commentators to describe the issue in terms of 'social cleansing' (Bloom 2017; *The Independent* 2015; Khomami 2015; Taylor 2015). Nzolameso's case reflects these trends – as well as echoes the situation of Katie, the lead character in the film *I, Daniel Blake* discussed in-depth in the previous chapter.

Local Authority decision making about social housing allocation is not just about the suitability of properties in general, but also about matching those properties to the specific needs of particular claimants – as the City of Westminster believed to have done when they sent Titina Nzolameso a letter with the following quote:

There is a severe shortage of accommodation in Westminster and it is not reasonably practicable for us to offer a Westminster home for everyone who applies for one. That is why we have had to offer you accommodation in Milton Keynes. Although it is outside Westminster, having considered your circumstances, we *believe this accommodation is suitable for you*. (City of Westminster quoted in *Nzolameso*: 555, emphasis mine)

Regardless of the council's unilateral *belief* in the accommodation's suitability for Nzolameso and her family, however, the property appears to be a poor fit to her needs – primarily due to its location. The council letter does not, for instance, address Nzolameso's claim that her friends in Westminster helped her with childcare whenever she was hospitalised; nor does it consider what support and resources would be available for her in Bletchley, particularly in terms of childcare. While the council did consider her children's schooling needs and her medical needs, neither were seen as issues that would preclude her from moving to Bletchley. Furthermore, while the council initially accepted Nzolameso as belonging to a specific priority group when they accepted their duty to house her, at the point of

decision making about *where* to house her family, however, the specific needs that were a direct consequence of her belonging to that priority group dropped out of the framework almost entirely.

In 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published supplementary guidance that strengthened the obligation for LAs to find accommodation as close as possible to where a household had previously resided. The guidance states that LAs

are required to take into account the significance of any disruption with specific regard to employment, caring responsibilities or education of the applicant or members of their household. *Where possible the authority should seek to retain established links with schools, doctors, social workers and other key services and support.* (quoted in *ibid.*: 559, emphasis in the original)

Of course the ‘established links’ Nzolameso had with medical professionals and her children’s schools, for example, would have been disrupted had she accepted the council’s housing offer. The more informal support and friendship networks she relied on, for instance for childcare, would have also suffered from the move, however, but they are not considered either in the official guidance or in the council’s decision. This omission reveals a value judgement implicit in the decision-making process, highlighting the differential value that *formal* and *official*, compared to more *informal* and *unofficial*, support networks and relationship are assumed to have. While in Nzolameso’s case the council did not view even the more formal support and care relationships as significant enough a reason for her to continue to reside in Westminster (or London), the more informal ones were not part of the consideration in the first place.

White discusses the ‘incongruence between life as lived (“reality”) and its documentary representation (“papereality”)’ (2014: 76) that frequently appears in immigration proceedings. Along similar lines, the reality of Nzolameso’s intimate life was not reflected in the decision-making processes that only considered relationships with official, *documentable*, status as – potentially – important. The disruptions engendered in Nzolameso’s life were, thus, based on an implicit assessment that rendered

official relationships *more valuable* than unofficial ones. As Sarah Marie Hall argues, however, care involves ‘a complex assemblage of intimate relations, including combinations of kin [--], friends [--] or strangers [--]’ (2016b: 1020).¹⁵⁹ The decision-making processes in Nzolameso’s case overlooked both ‘the importance of family members and friends outside of parent/child relationships, individuals who feature as part of a broader network of intimacy’ (Hall 2016a: 311), and, consequently, that care is seldom a one-way process but tends to, instead, be immersed in interdependence and interconnectedness. The appraisal of Nzolameso’s intimate and caring life through a hierarchical ordering of official and unofficial relationships also highlights the decision makers’ view of disability as a *medical* category above all (Shakespeare 2000), as her relationship with medical professionals was part of the decision-making process, but other relationships that enabled her to live a *liveable life* were not. Overall, then, it was the kind of care and intimacy that develops ‘within everyday routines and relationships, impossible to price apart from interdependencies, interpersonal relations, inter- and intra-generationality’ (Hall 2016b: 1029) that was seen as the least valuable and, consequently, susceptible to the most significant disruption in Nzolameso’s case.

This case, thus, illustrates that Local Authorities and other key decision makers are intimately involved in – apart from finding ‘suitable’ accommodations – making decisions about what constitutes a *liveable life* for someone supported by housing benefit. Judith Butler develops the concept of liveability specifically in relation to the role of gender and sexuality norms in regimes of recognisability, arguing that ‘certain humans are not recognized as human at all, and that leads to [an] order of unlivable life’ (2004b: 2).¹⁶⁰ For her, recognisability may be a condition of liveability, but at the same time the terms by which one is recognised may also make life unliveable. She goes on to ask after the ‘minimum conditions for a livable

¹⁵⁹ See also Sandhu and Stevenson (2015) for a discussion of the impacts that losing community support networks can have for racialised and ethnic minority families, in particular.

¹⁶⁰ In later work Butler (2004a, 2009) further develops this concept to examine the schemes of intelligibility that establish who counts as human and, consequently, whose lives, when lost, are worth public grieving.

life with regard to human life' (*ibid.*: 39). Although Butler is interested in the *normative* – rather than *material* – conditions for a liveable life, her conceptualisation is, nonetheless, relevant here. A liveable life is made up not only of the basic conditions required for surviving, such as shelter and medical care, but also, for instance, of the full range of intimate and caring relationships that a person requires to thrive – which were in Nzolameso's case excluded from consideration from the first instance of decision making onwards. Certain conditions of *liveability* are, thus, implicit in the decision-making processes that attach to both the Bedroom Tax and the LA practice of moving housing benefit recipients out of the LA area, as exemplified in the Nzolameso case.

The absence of a consideration for informal care and intimate relations from the council's decision (as well as from the official guidance), thus, reveals an implicit assumption that a liveable life for a housing benefits recipient or a homeless household can – and should – be achieved by meeting basic needs for shelter and medical care and, crucially, by making sure that any existing paid employment can be continued – echoing the implications of the 'worklessness' discourse examined in chapter 3. While at first glance it might seem that the council simply failed to act according to the statutory guidance, quoted above, and to provide Nzolameso with accommodation that met her needs, I want to, here, highlight a slightly different set of questions in relation to the case. If Local Authorities are obliged to, 'where possible', retain established links with doctors, social services, and schools when securing housing, what are the conditions in which it *is* permissible to sever these links and to, therefore, potentially make a life unliveable? According to the letter sent to Nzolameso, quoted above, unfavourable local housing market conditions alone were enough to justify the council's decision to offer her housing outside of Westminster. Given the ease with which this decision was made in Nzolameso's case – as well as undoubtedly in many others – perhaps the question should be phrased as: are there, in fact, *any* conditions in which the liveability of life takes precedence over financial considerations?

Nzolameso was first moved to bed and breakfast accommodation in the neighbouring borough, then asked to move outside of London entirely, and when she refused this offer, her children were placed into care. These multiple changes of course in significant ways *disrupted* Nzolameso and her children's lives. However, they do not constitute 'disruption' in the sense intended in the supplementary guidance (quoted above) – the council believed it had done enough to meet the requirements of the guidance by citing the 'severe shortage of accommodation in Westminster' as the reason it was not 'reasonably practicable' (Nzolameso: 555) to offer her housing in the borough. What then, *does* count as disruption? Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, what are the circumstances in which moving to a faraway location chosen by someone else would *not* constitute significant 'disruption with specific regard to employment, caring responsibilities or education of the applicant or members of their household' (quoted in *ibid.*: 559), as required by the guidance? Here *disruption* begins to appear as something *inherent* to the decision-making process, rather than something that the LA in question strives to avoid at all cost.

The Supreme Court ruled in Nzolameso's favour, specifically stating that the standard paragraph included in the council's decision letter was not sufficient, as it did not include information about what accommodation was available in Westminster and why it had not been offered to her; whether accommodation closer to Westminster was considered; and what, if any, inquiries had been made to assess how practical the move would be for Nzolameso.¹⁶¹ However, had the council letter provided this information, including a detailed assessment of the properties available in Westminster as well as elsewhere in Greater London, the disruptions to Nzolameso and her children's relational and intimate lives would have, presumably, been justifiable, as well as lawful. The Bedroom Tax, similarly, materialises as *inherently disruptive* if we consider the conditions of *unliveability* engendered by the policy. Does the requirement that Rian no longer spend three days per week with his father constitute an unliveable life for either or

¹⁶¹ Nzolameso has since been reunited with her children and relocated to the outskirts of London (Gentleman 2015).

both of them? Or the request that A move out of her specially adapted property? Here both the *intimate disruptions* themselves, and the resulting conditions of *unliveability*, are *built into* the processes by which these two policies and practices operate at the level of implementation.

At the same time as the DCLG acted to strengthen the guidance on the importance of close location in finding privately rented accommodation for housing benefit recipients, the Government was also careful to emphasise that the guidance did not prohibit placements out of LA area 'where they are unavoidable nor where they are the choice of the applicant' (cited in *ibid.*: 559). Additionally, just a year earlier, the same Government had introduced the changes to the Local Housing Allowance rates, as well as the changes introduced in the Localism Act 2011 that made it easier for LAs to discharge their homelessness duty by offering a homeless household accommodation in the private rented sector – both significant contributing factors behind the increase in out-of-council housing placements. Nzolameso's case highlights clearly these contrasting pressures faced by Local Authorities. On the one hand, the new guidance places a demand on councils to accommodate households as close to their previous housing as possible, carefully taking into account their specific circumstances and needs; but on the other, many of the previously existing barriers to placing households out of borough have at the same time been removed. Curiously then, the *same* Government was involved in legislating in ways that both support this increasing practice and curb some of its effects. State power, thus, here appears to be operating through an increasingly complicated regulatory framework that both strongly incentivises LAs to use out of borough placements and publicly speaks against them.

The parameters both for what is considered 'suitable' accommodation, and for what constitutes a liveable life are, thus, being *narrowed* by the complex and contradictory regulatory framework around housing placements for housing benefit recipients. As housing market conditions and other factors are leading to councils finding it increasingly difficult to house all the homeless households within their areas, more and more out-of-council placements – and, relatedly, more and more intimate

disruptions – will, as a consequence, become ‘unavoidable’ for them. The punitiveness of this practice arises in the contradictory pressures created by national policies that function to both encourage and discourage the practice. It is, thus, in the *contradictions* between the aims and effects of different national policies, as well as again – similarly to the Bedroom Tax – in the *gaps* between national policy aims and the local resources (un)available for meeting them, that it emerges as intensely disruptive. *Intimate disruptions* are, thus, built into this contradictory policy framework, in such a way that the conditions of *unliveability* that result from these disruptions are part and parcel of the processes by which state power is being reconfigured through its supposed decentralisation in the context of neoliberalising austerity.

Everyday Disruptions

In 2011, Miss Reilly participated in *Sector-Based Work Academy (SBWA)*, a DWP programme for JSA claimants that includes ‘pre-employment training’ and a work experience placement. The scheme is aimed at those without any serious barriers to finding work, and it is administered by Jobcentres. Participation in SBWA is voluntary but becomes mandatory once a claimant has accepted a place. However, Reilly was incorrectly told by a Jobcentre adviser that her participation was compulsory and, consequently, ended her volunteer placement at a museum in order to take part.

In August 2011 Mr Wilson was informed by his Jobcentre adviser that in order to continue receiving JSA, he had to take part in *Community Action Programme (CAP)*, a DWP scheme that aims to help long-term unemployed claimants go back to work. The programme is administered by private companies, including Ingeus, and it provides up to six months of near full-time work experience, as well as includes additional weekly job search requirements. Over the following months, Wilson was sent multiple letters informing him that his CAP would begin if he did not find a paid job within a specified timeframe. He was officially selected for CAP in November 2011 and subsequently informed by an Ingeus employee that he would be required to work for 30 hours per week for 26 weeks, or until he found

employment of at least 16 hours per week, although these details were not set in writing. Wilson refused to participate in the scheme on the grounds that he 'was not prepared to work for free, particularly for such a long period of time' (*Reilly*). As a result, he was subjected to multiple benefit sanctions, totalling six months.

The Supreme Court ruled in favour of Reilly and Wilson on the basis that the 2011 DWP regulations that both workfare programmes were based on did not contain a sufficiently detailed description of the schemes. Had Iain Duncan Smith – Work and Pensions Secretary at the time – not put forward emergency retroactive legislation to introduce new regulations immediately after the earlier Court of Appeal judgement – also in favour of the claimants – the Government could have been liable to refund up to 250,000 claimants for unlawful sanctioning.¹⁶² There are no official figures on the number of people undertaking unpaid work through the various workfare schemes at any given time and, at the same time, many of them are not counted in official unemployment figures, casting doubt on the accuracy of the Government's unemployment data.¹⁶³ However, the stories of Reilly and Wilson appear in line with many witness statements available on the activist websites working on challenging workfare (Boycott Workfare 2018b). Like Wilson, many claimants who take part in workfare schemes are sanctioned, with failure to participate in a training or employment scheme being the most frequently occurring mistake that results in a sanction (Beatty et al. 2015). Individuals can be recommended for a sanction by both Jobcentre advisers and workfare programme providers, and final sanctioning decisions are made by DWP decision makers. 24 per cent of all JSA claimants between 2010-15 received a sanction (Morse 2016: 5).

Ingeus placed Wilson with an organisation that collects and restores used furniture and distributes it to people in need, requiring him to work for

¹⁶² However, in 2016 the Court of Appeal ruled that the retroactive legislation was, in fact, itself incompatible with human rights law (Butler 2016a). At the time of writing no further appeals had been lodged by the DWP or the claimants.

¹⁶³ In 2012 the Trades Union Congress (TUC) suggested that the UK's real unemployment figure could be up to 6.3 million – significantly higher than the official figures at the time: 2.68 million (ILO definition of unemployment) or 1.6 million (claimant court figures) (TUC 2012).

30 hours per week. This placement followed the final letter sent to Wilson informing him about the start of his CAP placement, which stated: ‘to keep getting Jobseeker’s Allowance, you will need to take part in the [CAP] until you are told otherwise or your award of jobseeker’s allowance comes to an end; and *complete any activities that Ingeus asks you to do*’ (quoted in Reilly: 464-465, emphasis mine). The letter notifies Wilson that he must do *anything* that Ingeus – the private company administering CAP – asks him to do. Workfare programmes frequently entail near full-time participation in the work experience or activity scheme involved – mirroring the expectation set out in the Universal Credit regulations for unemployed claimants to ‘think of jobseeking as a full-time job’ (Gov.UK 2016b). The regulations also tell claimants that they are ‘expected to look or prepare for work for 35 hours a week’ and ‘to do everything [they] reasonably can to give [themselves] the best chance of finding work’ (*ibid.*). Overall, then, people in receipt of unemployment-related benefits (JSA, ESA, and UC) are increasingly required to spend as much *time* participating in DWP-mandated job-seeking and training activities as they would in a full-time job – at the risk of a sanction, should they fail to provide evidence of complying with the requirements set out in their claimant commitments.

At the most basic level, then, both workfare schemes and the full-time job-seeking requirements for JSA, ESA, and UC claimants take away the participants’ *time* – and their ability to decide how to use it. These requirements can certainly have very significant effects on claimants’ ability to meet their formal and informal caring responsibilities – as well as other kinds of responsibilities, such as the volunteering work that Reilly was involved in prior to her work experience placement at Poundland. Controlling and managing claimants’ use of time – and penalties for perceived *poor* or *erroneous* use of one’s time – also appear to be a key feature of benefit sanctions. Many activist sites that track personal experiences of sanctioning detail examples of claimants being penalised for ‘infractions’ such as attending a funeral, a job interview, an interview with a workfare programme provider, or a volunteering placement – instead of a

scheduled Jobcentre appointment.¹⁶⁴ This ‘micro-management of the poor’ (Peck 2001: 449) ensures that ‘these days people who are poor have no money, no time – and no place’ (Friedli and Stearn 2015: 45).

Del Roy Fletcher and Sharon Wright discuss the rise of ‘conduct conditionality’ in the UK welfare system, increasingly taking the form of ‘coercive behaviouralism’ (2018: 324).¹⁶⁵ Lynne Friedli and Robert Stearn, similarly, argue that unemployment policies ‘now aim at more complete and intimate behaviour change through coercive mechanisms of greater scope’ (2015: 41). These demands for particular *patterns of behaviour* from welfare recipients also relate to the recent increases in *contractual* governance within both welfare and housing policy, in the form of, for instance, ‘Parenting Contracts’ and ‘Acceptable Behaviour Contracts’ (Bond-Taylor 2014) – thus also highlighting the growing convergence between criminal and welfare policy agendas. As well as behavioural change, workfare programme and benefit sanctions can aim at changes in *attitude* or *affect*. As Friedli and Stearn detail:

The psychological attributes and dispositions of individuals and communities (the ostensible presence or absence of optimism, aspiration, self-efficacy, conscientiousness, sense of coherence) are being used to account for unemployment (and for a range of other social outcomes, notably health inequalities) and are promoted via psychological interventions that aim to modify cognitive function or emotional disposition/affect. (2015: 42)

These trends also include a parallel rise in the use of *brain science* in explaining social issues and problematic behaviours, thus echoing the increasing use of brain science as ‘evidence’ in cultural poverty arguments, discussed in Chapter 3.¹⁶⁶

Demands for particular *attitudes*, *affects*, and *behaviours*, particularly in relation to one’s use of *time*, are, thus, the key ways in which workfare programmes and benefit sanctions materialise as everyday disruptions.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Stupid Sanctions (2018) and the Trussell Trust (2014).

¹⁶⁵ See also Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s (2014) study on conditionality and sanctions in the UK welfare system.

¹⁶⁶ As Friedli and Stearn detail, this trend reads social problems through understanding the brain, correlating ‘outcomes (crime, addiction, health behaviour, educational attainment) with brain structure’ (2015: 42).

Again questions about the *liveability* of such tightly managed lives emerge – does a liveable life require some level of control over one’s everyday activities and attitudes? Does, for instance, the replacement of one’s informal caring duties with unpaid work at a for-profit organisation constitute a *necessary disruption* to the liveability of one’s life, justifiable with reference to the perceived unfairness of unemployment benefits? Or should some value be found within such volunteer or informal (caring) work itself, thus countering any value that such a replacement creates, for example in the form of increased ‘employability’?¹⁶⁷ Here the examples of both White Dee and Katie from the previous chapter’s discussion are relevant, raising the question: what would be the – both monetary and other – consequences of them being required to step away from the informal care and support work they engage in and instead spend their time applying for jobs and making themselves more ‘employable’? Again, the *absence* of such considerations highlights the *in-builtness* of intimate disruptions to the regulatory frameworks of both workfare programmes and the sanctions regime. The conditions of unliveability engendered by these practices are here seen as the direct result of a desire to control and manage the minutiae of unemployed benefit claimants’ everyday lives – a desire that, at the same time, does not necessarily support the aims of the policies it attaches to.

As with the two practices and policies examined above, in the case of both sanctions and workfare a curious gap emerges between the programme’s stated aims – helping and incentivising people to find work (or more work) – and their actual intimate effects.¹⁶⁸ For instance, applying for jobs on Christmas day, or attending a scheduled Jobcentre appointment instead of a close relative’s funeral,¹⁶⁹ do not appear as centrally important for the aim of helping people find work. Further, in many cases the programmes’ everyday effects actually function *counter* to their stated aims – people have been sanctioned for attending an interview for a paid job or a

¹⁶⁷ As highlighted in Chapter 3, and suggested by MacDonald et al.’s (2014b) study, long-term unemployed people tend to engage in substantial amounts of care and voluntary work.

¹⁶⁸ Although the demand for psychological and attitudinal changes does also somewhat correspond to the DWP’s own stated aims (Callard and Stearn 2015).

¹⁶⁹ Both real-life examples of reasons for which individuals have been sanctioned (Stupid Sanctions 2018; Trussell Trust 2014).

Jobcentre mandated training programme instead of a Jobcentre appointment, as well as for not continuing to look for work after already securing paid employment due to start in a few weeks' time (Trussell Trust 2014). My argument here is that it is at least partially due to the increasing *fragmentation* of service delivery in the areas of both sanctioning and workfare that the intimate effects emerge in individuals' lives, rather than necessarily – or as well as – because of straightforward punitiveness. Without a consideration of these processes, the punitiveness of these practices seems to appear out of nowhere, either because of a totalising but ephemeral notion of neoliberalism, or alternatively as the result of the decisions of a coherent state actor, desiring intentionally to punish its poor(er) citizens – both of which seem inadequate as standalone explanations.

At the institutional level, workfare programme delivery is increasingly stratified, such that many of the programmes (such as CAP) are provided and managed by private corporations – that sometimes further subcontract the placement of some claimants to other corporations – with the work experience placements themselves taking place at a mixture of private, public, and third sector organisations. Claimants can be recommended for sanctioning by both Jobcentre advisers and workfare programme providers. At the individual level, the DWP has recently put more emphasis on one-to-one relationships between claimants and staff, introducing greater flexibility for Jobcentre staff to tailor conditions to specific claimants (Morse 2016). Claimants, consequently, often depend on a specific staff member not just for the continuation of their benefits, but also for key information and advice, for instance on the requirements they need to fulfil to avoid being sanctioned. Thus, at both the organisational and the individual levels a dizzying array of actors is involved in making decisions about claimant requirements, workfare programmes, and sanctions. These decisions are, further, often driven by imperatives other than helping people find work. Sharon Wright's study at a Jobcentre concludes that 'the work done by front-line staff was [--] structured more by pressures of time, forms, computer systems and performance targets than by statements of official

policy or guidance' (2002: 249), also echoing a National Audit Office (NAO) review that found the use of sanctions to be 'linked as much to management priorities and local staff discretion as it is to claimants' behaviour' (Morse 2016: 9). Consequently, the delivery of both workfare and sanctions may deviate significantly from their original stated aims, as the large number of street-level bureaucrats involved in their implementation re-create policy through their day-to-day work.

The information provided to claimants about workfare schemes in advance is often vague and sometimes incorrect – as highlighted in the cases of both Wilson, who received a letter informing him he must 'complete *any* activities that Ingeus asks [him] to do' (quoted in *Reilly*: 465, emphasis mine), and Reilly, who was given incorrect information about the voluntary nature of the SBWA scheme. The job-seeking requirements set out in claimant commitments also tend to be vague, and claimants have been sanctioned after being given incorrect information or different information by different advisers, or after misunderstanding the requirements (Trussell Trust 2014). While these inconsistencies and miscommunications – that sometimes lead to significant consequences to claimants, such as being left without any income for long periods of time – are certainly punitive, their punitiveness does not necessarily arise from the street-level bureaucrats' desire to punish claimants (although that is, indeed, also possible). Instead (or in addition), punitiveness is *built into* the increasingly complex and fragmented nature of service delivery. That there are significant inconsistencies in the application of benefit sanctions – referral rates vary substantially both across different Jobcentres and providers, and across time (Morse 2016) – suggests that, rather than a blanket shift towards penalisation, neoliberalisation tends to involve highly varying effects in the case of different localities, different providers, and even different individual staff members.

A further complication to this already convoluted regulatory framework is introduced by the inclusion of private corporations in the delivery of statework. A considerably higher number of sanctions referred by workfare providers are overturned after reconsideration or appeal when

compared to ones referred by Jobcentres,¹⁷⁰ suggesting either that the private companies involved in workfare are simply keener sanctioners, or that the information given to them by the government is inadequate or incorrect. Further, government contracts tend not to provide much detail about the exact nature of services that workfare providers should offer, and ‘what control there is, government exerts through a tiered system of “payment by results”’ (Friedli and Stearn 2015: 41-42). Overall then, there is very little oversight or accountability in the contracting of private corporations to deliver workfare programmes. Thus, while some have argued that these shifts and changes mean a transfer of state power to other actors, state power, in fact, here appears *diffused* across different actors, and the punitiveness of these policies conditioned by the vague and complicated policy frameworks themselves. While increasing penalisation may, indeed, be the *implicit* goal of these policies, it is, nonetheless, achieved *through* the ways in which the delivery and regulatory frameworks are organised: the increasing fragmentation of service delivery; the structuring of the relationships between government and private providers through ‘payment by results’ contracts; and the increasing discretion and leeway given to individual staff members.

An independent comparative review the DWP commissioned on workfare programmes in a number of other countries (Crisp and Fletcher 2008) confirms that people who engage in workfare schemes are no more likely to find a paid job than people who do not take part. Further, the DWP’s (DWP 2014a; cf. Bienkov 2014) own impact analysis reviewing a workfare scheme specifically targeting young Londoners with less than six months of prior paid work experience, *Day One Support for Young People Trailblazer*, found that those who completed the programme did worse in terms of finding paid employment than those who failed to complete the programme, with 26 per cent and 60 per cent finding paid work, respectively. Similarly, in the case of sanctioning, although the DWP does not collect or make publicly available much data, the international evidence suggests mixed

¹⁷⁰ 26 per cent in the case of providers, against the Jobcentres’ 11 per cent, in 2015 (Morse 2016: 5).

results (Morse 2016). While sanctioning may lead to an increased chance of employment, these effects are often short-lived and tend to result in lower wages. Further, sanctions also encourage some people to become inactive, stopping claiming benefits entirely without finding work – as China suggests when he helps Daniel complete his appeal form in *I, Daniel Blake*. Thus, the ability of either sanctions or workfare to meet their stated aims is, at best, questionable. At the same time, the policies' most disruptive effects are not directly related to these aims – perhaps suggesting again that the value of these programmes for the central government lies elsewhere.

Reconfiguring the Public/Private Divide

Scholarly analyses of conditional social welfare, and penalisation more broadly, sometimes cast them as part of a totalising narrative of neoliberalism. For Loïc Wacquant (2012), for instance, increasing penalisation is central to neoliberalism – and particularly to neoliberal state power – and the growing importance of what he terms 'prisonfare' proof of its centrality.¹⁷¹ These accounts tend to present a clear narrative of the *why* of penalisation – for Wacquant, for example, both workfare and prisonfare are needed to 'supervise the same dispossessed and dishonoured populations destabilised by the dissolution of the Fordist–Keynesian compact' (*ibid.*: 67). However, they tend to be considerably less explicit about the *how*, as well as sometimes about the *what*, of penalisation. In terms of the former, as Lacey (2013) points out, it is often unclear not only which political, economic, and social institutions constitute neoliberalism, but also how exactly they are implicated in producing neoliberal penalty. She argues that it is important to ask 'questions about *how* [neoliberalism] has emerged and what sorts of institutional structures are needed to sustain the policies, practices and arrangements which have come to be associated with neoliberalism; when they emerged; and where they hold sway' (*ibid.*: 261-262, emphasis in the original). In terms of the latter, scholarship also tends to assume that exactly what punishment or penalty looks like is

¹⁷¹ See Chapter 1 for more detail on Wacquant's conceptualisation of 'prisonfare' and 'workfare.'

unambiguous. Although in the simplest sense the meaning of penalty is, of course, clear, the practical, everyday effects of increasing penalisation or punitiveness in the neoliberalising landscape of austerity have not been a frequent topic of scholarly analysis.

In the above analysis, I have provided some answers to both questions – the *how* and the *what* – in the context of UK austerity politics, focusing on the *everyday, intimate* effects of penalty, as well as on the *institutional mechanisms* that produce such effects. Disruptions to intimate lives, relations, and spaces are absolutely central to the *what* of neoliberalising penalty, often constituting the primary means by which it materialises in everyday lives. As I have argued above, these disruptions, firstly, entail significant implicit judgements of the value of different kinds of intimate relations, practices, and spaces, and, secondly, they also tend to constitute considerable interruptions to the liveability of the lives of those affected. While these processes are, indeed, *punitive*, many of their most disruptive effects, thus, arise from their intrusions into the spheres of the intimate and the everyday. Penalisation itself is, here, seen as intimately connected to intimacy, in such a way that paying attention to the latter is necessary for understanding the former.¹⁷²

Neoliberalism is often seen as a doctrine of individualism and freedom, entailing a significant *reduction* not only in state power, but also in the extent to which the state seeks to intrude in the private sphere. The above analysis has, hopefully, illustrated some of the ways in which this is, clearly, *not* the case. In many instances neoliberalisation seems to, in fact, involve a significant *increase* in the extent to which the state seeks to intrude in the private sphere. The three case studies of this chapter all function as examples of such intrusions, whereby various agents of the state are involved in making decisions about where a person or family should live –

¹⁷² While my analysis has not examined the other side of the growing penalisation thesis – that of prisonfare – it is important to note that the interconnectedness of penalty to intimate disruption is not limited to its emergence in the sphere of social welfare or housing. As Rodriguez argues, in the workings of the prison-industrial complex, a central feature of punishment is the ‘stripping away of social and sexual belonging [--], accomplished in part through prohibitions on consensual sexual relations in prison and restrictions on visits with lovers, family, and friends that might allow the comfort of embrace, sexual or otherwise’ (2014: 16).

both geographically and in terms of specific accommodations; who they should live with; who they can (continue to) rely on for both formal and informal support; how many bedrooms they should have; how they should spend their time; how they should behave; and what attitudes they should adopt or perform – with the alternative to these intimate disruptions usually involving significant financial penalties, as well as possible destitution, homelessness, depression and anxiety, or even death.¹⁷³ Thus, the neoliberalising state seems, here, to be entering the private sphere of some of its citizens with growing intensity – or, as Wacquant argues, ‘actually existing neoliberalism extolls “laissez faire et laissez passer” for the dominant, but it turns out to be paternalist and intrusive for the subaltern’ (2012: 74).

Yongmie Nicola Jo argues that – in her case, specifically, means-tested – social welfare ‘arguably [--] constitutes a violation of the fundamental right to privacy, the applicant’s life becoming an “open book”’ (2016: 524), from which a caseworker can determine, for instance, their eligibility to welfare or social housing, or decide whether they should be recommended for a sanction. Indeed, some Jobcentre advisers have requested access to claimants’ personal email accounts in order to gain proof of their job-searching efforts (Stupid Sanctions 2018). Such privacy and intimacy violations seem part and parcel of the processes of neoliberalising penalisation, which affect not just the *boundaries* of the sphere of privacy one has access to, but also how one *experiences* privacy – for example through the loss of a safety net following an out-of-council housing placement. Centrally, then, a key effect of neoliberalisation in the intimate sphere is that this sphere is no longer quite one’s own – with other people, institutions, and priorities determining how it should be organised.

¹⁷³ The deaths associated with sanctioning and Work Capability Assessments have been compiled online (Calum’s List 2018). In 2015 the DWP, in response to a Freedom of Information request, also released the statistic that 2,380 people had died after being declared ‘fit for work’ between December 2011 and February 2014 (Butler 2015) – thus also echoing the storyline of Daniel in the film *I, Daniel Blake*, examined in the previous chapter. For more detail on the effects of sanctioning, see Morse (2016), JRF (2014), and Beatty et al. (2015).

The intimate disruptions detailed in this chapter, thus, also play a part in reconfiguring the public/private divide – although it is important to note that I am not suggesting that this distinction is, or has been in the past, in any way stable. That the boundaries between public and private vary – particularly along racial and class lines – has been argued by many (Alexander 1994; Boyd 1997; Carby 1982; Mahmood 2005). My argument here, however, also relates to the centrality of these reconfigurations to processes of neoliberalisation, where regulating the division between public and private remains a key aspect of the state's role.¹⁷⁴ This discussion, thus, also provides a connection to my analysis in Chapter 3, where I argued that citizenship is becoming increasingly tied to private – familial and sexual – acts and values performed in the quotidian. In this chapter I have highlighted some of the consequences that *failing* this performance carries – echoing Lauren Berlant's argument that 'the fantasy of a private, protected national space is a fantasy only a nonstigmatized person, a privileged person, can realistically imagine living' (1997: 213). It is, thus, the same populations whose intimacies are often already deemed inappropriate – and who, therefore, risk endangering the nation's future – whose intimate lives also tend to be most severely disrupted and intruded upon by the state.

The second key way in which neoliberalism tends to be viewed as entailing changes and shifts in the public/private divide is in the reductions in state power – and corresponding increases in the power and freedom of other actors – that it supposedly involves. However, the above discussion should also have highlighted that this aspect of what neoliberalisation is often assumed to encompass is not as straightforward as it may seem. As I argued in relation to the Bedroom Tax, the LA practice of out-of-council housing placements, and workfare and benefit sanctions, penalisation frequently emerges *in practice* less like a straightforward and intentional drive to punish, based on the decisions of a coherent and singular state actor. The distinctive features of policy-making in a neoliberalising context are often 'confused – deliberately or otherwise – with preordained or inevitable forms of state restructuring and policy change (when they are, of

¹⁷⁴ See Cooper (1993) on this role of the state more generally.

course, nothing of the sort)’ (Peck 2001: 446). Instead of analytically presenting neoliberalism as ‘everywhere and nowhere at the same time’ (*ibid.*: 446), thus, I have tried to provide an account of some of the processes that Peck terms ‘distinctively new forms of policy reconstruction and regulatory rollout [, which] may lack – and perhaps this is the point – the orderly lines and logics of Keynesian-welfare statism’ (2003: 223). This ‘new regulatory “unsettlement”’ (*ibid.*: 223) involves a set of messy, complex, and uneven processes of institutional restructuring, which, furthermore, blur the boundaries between policy areas, delivery systems, and governance and accountability mechanisms, as Peck (*ibid.*) suggests.

Above I have located the emergence of penalisation precisely in the fragmented and complex processes of *restructuring* and *blurring* – between central government, on the one hand, and local councils, Jobcentres, private providers, and individual street-level bureaucrats, on the other – that accompany neoliberalising policy implementation and service delivery. Importantly, the gaps, discrepancies, contradictions, and fragmentations within the processes of implementation and service delivery frequently seem *driven* by central government action, even – or, perhaps, especially – in instances where national policy aims themselves appear contradictory. My analysis, thus, in part confirms the argument made by many that the neoliberalising processes of localisation (or decentralisation) and privatisation rarely involve a direct transfer of state capacities and power to other actors.¹⁷⁵ Instead, they tend to entail a range of *inter-scalar* shifts – in policy framings, resources, institutional capacities, delivery systems, accountability arrangements, and so on, whereby the national state remains firmly in control of the processes of ‘inter-scalar articulation’ (Jessop 2000: 182). Crucially then, these processes do not necessarily result in a weakening of the state, or a reduction in its power. Rather, state power (and the capacities for undertaking statework) are *dispersed* across a variety of actors in a ‘thin’ form of devolution, where autonomy for local actors appears as highly conditional within the new, dispersed systems of

¹⁷⁵ For variations of this argument, see Chapter 1, as well as Clarke (2004), Jones and Novak (1999), Newman and Clarke (2014), and Peck (2001).

implementation and service delivery, as both Peck (2001) and John Clarke (2004) argue.

Thus, whether the *other* actor involved in the delivery or implementation of a particular piece of statework is a Jobcentre, a private provider, or a Local Authority – or, indeed, an individual employee at any of them – their autonomy and capacity to act are both heavily constricted and *simultaneously* subjected to fewer and fewer accountability mechanisms. The local and/or private institutions, as well as the individual workers within them, are increasingly expected to act according to narrowly defined managerial imperatives, such as performance targets and mechanisms of audit – as the above discussion has, hopefully, illustrated.¹⁷⁶ However, *apart from* these managerial targets and mechanisms of scrutiny, very limited accountability arrangements are put in place for these actors. Consequently, much of the penalisation of, for example, welfare and housing policy takes place within this ‘black box’, where ‘there is virtually no oversight [--], no professional accountability and no effective means of appeal against them’ (Friedli and Stearn 2015: 41). Finally, because of the neoliberalising tendency towards almost *permanent* reform, these processes are unfinished, as well as in a constant state of flux, as many others (Clarke 2004; Jones and Novak 1999; Peck 2001) have argued. Neoliberalisation, thus, involves a complex and contradictory system of governance that blurs the public/private divide by placing contrasting demands on the local and/or private actors increasingly involved in statework, whose power and capacity to act are simultaneously expanded in some ways and restricted in others – as well as subject to repeated shifts and changes.

The increasing *intrusion* of the state into the intimate lives of poor and/or working-class populations – as well as the resulting shifts in the public/private distinction – are, thus, here seen as a direct consequence of the second key way in which neoliberalisation involves a changes to the public/private divide – that between the central government and the private and/or local actors that it subcontracts statework to. Although it is, indeed,

¹⁷⁶ On these managerial imperatives and auditory mechanisms, see Clarke (2004), Friedli and Stearn (2015), and Jones and Novak (1999).

possible that the intimate disruptions that neoliberalising penalisation materialises as are the *desired* consequences of the policies and practices discussed in this chapter, they are, nonetheless, achieved *through* the processes by which state power is being reconfigured – by way of a fragmented interplay between the local and national, and the public and private, actors involved in statework. The public/private divide is, therefore, in a process of reconfiguration in two separate, but intimately related, ways – first, in the sense that the boundaries of both statework and state power are being blurred, and second, in the sense that the state is increasingly disrupting, and intruding in, the intimate and everyday lives of the poorest and most disadvantaged populations. These developments have significant consequences not only for the people affected by them, but also for how political action against them might be conceived, as I explore in the next and final section of this chapter.

Reimagining the State: Spaces for Political Action

Janet Newman and John Clarke argue that ‘how we imagine the state, how we feel about it, will shape the kinds of politics that are possible’ (2014: 153). A view of the state as a coherent and singular actor, as something entirely separate from civil society, or as in the midst of a process of weakening or reducing in significance, is likely to result in feelings of disenchantment and loss. Whilst the *loss* of state funded institutions, public services, welfare, and, ‘not least, the capacity for public governance’ (*ibid.*: 153) in the era of austerity politics certainly warrants both scholarly attention and negative feelings, these losses are, nonetheless, not *all* that has happened to the state in this period. As many others have argued, states are thoroughly *peopled* institutions, ‘in which the success or failure of individual reform projects is very much a matter of micro-political struggle, as well as reflecting wider, more “structural” imperatives’ (Peck 2001: 451). Further, states are ‘contradictory and unstable institutions’, and it is precisely the instability, incompleteness, and unresolved contradictions that create ‘the spaces of possibility for alternative imaginaries of the state to emerge’ (Newman and Clarke 2014: 160). In this final section of the chapter I explore

the potential for such ‘spaces of possibility’ to emerge within the landscape of neoliberalising penalty, examining in particular whether the fragmented and complex nature of policy implementation and service delivery *itself* might be increasing such potential. By focusing solely on the possibility of political action emerging *within* the state, my intention is not to claim that activism *outside* of the state is somehow less significant but to, instead, intentionally direct attention to different understandings of the political.

The question of whether the neoliberalising processes by which state power is dispersed across a broader field of actors present genuine opportunities for political action has been asked by many. Peck, for instance, argues that ‘by accident or design, neoliberal policy programs seem to be especially effective in undermining potential sources of political opposition’, primarily because of how the neoliberalising ‘devolution of delivery systems and the continued churning of policy strategies tends to (over)stretch the capacities and diffuse the energy of oppositional movements, rather than opening up the space for more progressive local initiatives’ (2001: 452). Others (Newman 2013, 2014; Newman and Clarke 2014) claim, in contrast, that these processes of dispersal – while weakening democratic accountability, as argued above – can also generate new spaces for political action. The drive towards neoliberalisation has been very unevenly realised, both geographically and temporally, with the consequences of not just *local* variation, but also ‘the co-existence of diverse governmental, economic and political projects’ (Newman 2014: 3291). Neoliberalisation – like any new set of policy imperatives – has to ‘reach accommodations with other forces and fields’ (Newman 2013: 520), including, for instance, other kinds of understandings of the purpose and aims of social welfare or social housing, other kinds of attachments to the state, and other kinds of political desires in the very people responsible for the implementation of the most punitive neoliberalising reforms. It is in these other understandings, attachments, and desires that the potential for political space and action emerges within the state itself.

The week before the Bedroom Tax came into effect in April 2013 – with dozens of protests and direct action campaigns against the policy also

under way – Labour MP Frank Field called for landlords to take direct action in order to prevent the policy’s effects falling on the most vulnerable:

I hope landlords will brick up the doors to spare bedrooms and, where appropriate, knock down the walls, so that the properties can safely fit the tenants. I have never before asked for direct action. I do so now because I feel the measures are grossly unfair.
(Frank Field, Labour MP for Birkenhead, quoted in Morris 2013)

Despite a warning against such actions subsequently given by Welfare Reform Minister Lord David Freud – threatening to withdraw housing benefit subsidies to councils that ‘inappropriately’ reclassify properties because of the Bedroom Tax (Brown 2013) – some landlords and councils have, indeed, responded to Field’s call. In a well-publicised case, Knowsley Housing Trust in Merseyside reclassified almost 600 properties as smaller, exempting tenants from being subject to the Bedroom Tax (Tolley 2013). In a similar vein, Cobalt Housing in Liverpool began converting their properties in 2015 to better match the requirements of tenants in its area – literally knocking down walls (Criddle 2015). While in both cases these actions incurred costs for the relevant landlord, the reclassifications and conversions also make sense from the point of view of demand, as tenants are increasingly unwilling to be housed in properties deemed to have too many rooms under the new policy framework. Reports of various – usually Labour-run – councils exploring the possibility of taking similar action have followed (Morrison et al. 2013).

The below Twitter handles and website are – or, at least, claim to be – run by three (either past, or current and, therefore, covert) Jobcentre advisers and a Work Capability Assessor employed by Atos:

@JobcentreMole

@jcpAdwiser

@secretassessor1

jobseekersanctionadvice.com

As the ‘about’ sections on their respective Twitter pages state, the ‘JobcentreMole’ is ‘whistleblowing to help anyone wanting to know what [Jobcentre Plus] dont want you to know. Try me’, and the ‘Not So Secret

Assessor' describes themselves as 'just a small spoke in a big wheel, barely noticeable until that spoke snaps', adding 'oh yeah, looking for a new job!' The @jcpAdwiser handle and the website are run by former Jobcentre advisers and ex-DWP staff, respectively, both offering help and support for people dealing with the benefits system. The website offers advice specifically for appealing sanctioning decisions and challenging workfare referrals, thus responding directly to the frequent inconsistencies and vagueness in the information that Jobcentres provide to claimants, as discussed above. *The Independent* reported on the website in 2014, stating that the 'three disgruntled former civil servants' who set the website up 'have been inundated with pleas for help [from] welfare claimants who believe their benefits have been wrongly docked' (Morris 2014).

While the challenge offered by these social media examples to the increasingly disciplinary and disruptive politics of austerity is, perhaps, less direct than that provided by the LA and landlord examples above, they do, nonetheless, provide a challenge. It is of course no surprise that the individuals behind these social media profiles have all chosen to remain anonymous, regardless of whether they are current or previous employees of the DWP or Atos. Perhaps the fact that some of them have only begun to protest the DWP's politics since no longer working for the Department helps their designation as 'disgruntled former civil servants', as in the *Independent* article above. Alternatively, however, perhaps it could also signal the possibility that their 'creative labour [--] can lever governmental resources and capacities for "other" purposes and/or bring alternative perspectives and skill sets into the policy process' (Newman 2013: 525). Their actions may, thus, mitigate some of the harsher effects of punitive policy frameworks, as these workers 'perform their own active/activist citizenship in and through their public service roles' (*ibid.*: 525) – as well as after leaving these roles. Importantly, then, both the actions *and* the alternative understandings and desires of these workers may also function to transform the state, as workers who, for instance, imagine the state as connected to social justice may seek to actualise this imaginary in their work, as Davina Cooper (2014) suggests. The compassionate actions of street-level

bureaucrats, thus, make 'it possible to imagine political institutions of a less bad life' (Berlant 2011: 172) – as well as, perhaps, *a state* 'of a less bad life.'

Somewhat similarly, the LA and landlord actions to counter the effects of the Bedroom Tax echo the implications of some of the research that has been conducted on 1980s municipal activism in the UK, most notably by Cooper (2017) and Newman (2012). At the time, many councils opposing the politics of Prime Minister Thatcher's Conservatives found creative ways of, for instance, supporting oppositional projects and local groups by 'drawing on residual or unintended resources' (Cooper 2017: 348) and by using 'creative accounting techniques' (*ibid.*: 346). As well as the reclassifications enacted by some councils and landlords specifically to counter the effects of the Bedroom Tax, and the actions both current and former DWP employees have taken to help claimants navigate the increasingly punitive welfare policy landscape, as above, various other examples of such creative action are certainly *imaginable*. Thus, while these examples are rather limited in scope, they do, nonetheless, indicate the existence of a *potential* for local councils – and other actors – to take action both to mitigate the most punitive and disruptive of the effects of austerity, and to advance a differently oriented politics from that of neoliberalising austerity. These examples – both from the 1980s and from the current era of austerity – also suggest possibilities for states – or parts of the state – 'to provide a productive terrain where progressive politics can happen' (*ibid.*: 338), and where the capacity to 'push back [on] neoliberal state forms that serve to centralize and concentrate political and economic power' (Cumbers 2015: 70) can increase.

The situations of Local Authorities in the 1980s and in the post-2010 austerity era are, of course, not directly comparable, especially because of the ways in which the neoliberalising politics of austerity have reduced 'the capacity of local governments to offer an alternative base for political action' (Newman 2012: 852). Further, even in the 1980s, the left – or 'activist' – councils were 'far from autonomous, being simultaneously embedded in national sector hierarchies, such as education, while leveraged and guided by central government carrots and restraints' (Cooper 2017: 342). Finally,

the capacities of LAs and other actors to take such oppositional action also vary depending on the cultural, political, and economic resources available to them, as Newman (2013) suggests. She goes on to argue that, nonetheless, the historical tendency for central-local relations in the UK to be highly antagonistic persists – even despite the contradictory pressures of neoliberalisation. Thus, while Local Authorities and other local (state) actors are certainly embedded within the broader material, cultural, and discursive context (of austerity), as well as subject to various constraints imposed by central government actions and aims – as the above discussion has highlighted – at the same time, they are not just passive recipients of national government instruction, or victims of processes of neoliberalisation, either. They may also be crucial in reproducing, reworking, and reconstituting – or, in other words, *resignifying* – neoliberal discourses, logics, and policy imperatives, as well as acting as ‘incubators of new possibilities that may bend or adapt neoliberal logics or [--] establish alternative pathways’ (*ibid.*: 3296).

The actions of both the individual workers and the Local Authorities and other state actors, can, thus, perhaps also be usefully thought of as a *politics of refusal*, akin to that enacted by the racialised and sexualised members of the ‘underclass’, examined in the previous chapter. These actors refuse the positions the dominant discursive and regulatory frameworks of the neoliberalising austerity state seek to place them in, instead bringing their alternative understandings and desires to bear on the state. They challenge the common assumption ‘that the state is only made up of dominant interests, beliefs, systems, logics, and practices’, foregrounding the actions, beliefs, and desires of the state’s ‘*dissident* and *transient* parts’ instead (Cooper 2016b: 317, emphases in the original). Further, and similarly to Cooper, I understand these dissident forces as *part of* the state, and their actions as, consequently, potentially exercising state power, thus also highlighting the potential for reimagining states themselves – with the potential for them to be ‘a source of emergent rationalities, and provide resources for experiment and innovation’ (Newman and Clarke 2014: 158). Such a view counters and challenges not only the common view of

institutions, and particularly states, ‘as purely coercive structures [--] – a form of thinking that clings [--] to a remarkably essentialist view of institutions’ (Felski 2015: 147), but also the common understanding of neoliberalism as an overwhelming, all-encompassing force that leaves no space for alternative rationalities or politics, as Chapter 1 discussed.

Cooper suggests that loosening the discursive ties between welfare and coercion might help us ‘imagine the state’s welfare identity [--] extending towards sensual pleasures, creativity, and human fulfilment (rather than work, security, discipline, and risk)’ (2014: 70). Perhaps, in a similar vein, the state’s dissident parts could also help it extend towards *liveability* and the *value of intimacy* – rather than every part of the state always, without exception, reproducing the conditions of unliveability and the overwhelming emphases on financial value examined above. While I do not want to overstate the potential for political action within the state itself – especially given both the power of institutional learning and the strength of the austerity discourses examined in Chapter 3 – *imagining* parts of the state as having the capacity to extend beyond its penal and disciplinary functions in this way *in itself* provides important political value. Without such imaginaries the neoliberalising state appears as total – and totally dominant – with the only source of political action to counter it located entirely outside of it. In this section I have argued that the realities of both states and neoliberalisation are, in fact, more complex, more uneven, and more contradictory than what both popular understandings and neoliberal discourse itself suggest, thus potentially allowing for different desires – such as those extending towards liveability and the value of intimacy – to emerge and grow within their folds.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined three practices and policies frequently seen as examples of the growing conditionality in, and penalisation of, social welfare and other policy frameworks as a result of neoliberalisation. I focused on the intimate, everyday effects of these policies and practices, highlighting the judgements of the value of different kinds of intimate

relations, needs, and practices embedded in them, as well as suggesting that they, consequently, engender certain conditions of unliveability in the lives of affected individuals. I then argued that these intimate disruptions materialise – at least partially – due to the fragmented and complex ways in which neoliberalising policy implementation and service delivery tend to proceed and, more specifically, because of the resulting gaps and discrepancies both between different national policy frameworks, and between national policy aims and the limited local resources available for realising them. That these intimate disruptions are becoming part and parcel of neoliberalising austerity politics suggests a significant reconfiguration of the public/private divide, as the neoliberalising state intrudes more and more on the intimate, everyday lives of its poorest and most disadvantaged populations. They also entail a further reconfiguration of the public/private distinction, whereby the boundaries of both statework and state power are becoming increasingly blurred, with the number of local and/or private actors involved in exercising state power – albeit usually within a highly conditional framework – continuously growing within the landscape of austerity politics.

Finally, this chapter has also continued the previous two chapters' discussions of the possibilities for political action, subjectivities, and imaginaries within austerity politics, arguing that another kind of politics of refusal is possible *within the state*, thus, perhaps, complementing the many activist actions that have been taken against neoliberal penalisation. Since the violent everyday disruptions engendered by the policies and practices discussed in this chapter 'exceed the register of a politics organized solely around sexuality' (Rodriguez 2014: 11), the kind of politics of refusal highlighted in this chapter is – similarly to the previous two chapters – not dependent on attachments to, or alignments with, either sexual or classed identity categories. Such a politics is, perhaps, more akin to Ann Cvetkovich's suggestion that 'daily life in all its ordinariness can be a basis for the utopian project of building new worlds in response to both spiritual despair and political depression' (2012: 191). Overall, my discussion has, thus, hopefully also highlighted some ways of thinking *the political*

differently – outside of the desire that our political imaginaries neatly match our identities, as well as that it can be organised entirely outside of the state.

Reimagining Sexual Politics

Conclusion

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A Scene of Protest: Part One

In the autumn of 2014, not long after beginning the process of writing this thesis, I watched the film *Pride* in the cinema. Directed by British stage director Matthew Warchus, the film tells the story of a group of gay and lesbian activists in 1980s London, who begin a campaign to raise money for miners and their families affected by the 1984-5 miners' strike under the name 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners' (LGSM). The film sees the group gradually getting to know the residents of a small mining town in the Welsh countryside – chosen as the target of their fundraising efforts primarily because they were the first to accept, while many others refused, the group's money, tainted by its association with sexual deviance. Based loosely on real-life events, the film's narrative is one of overcoming differences towards a common goal, and much of its narrative drive – as well as its comedy – derives from the awkward encounters between the urban gay and lesbian activists and the Welsh working-class miners.

This overall narrative arch is exemplified in the storylines of two characters, one on each side of the political divide central to the film. Gethin is the owner of the Gay's the Word bookshop in London but originally from Wales. During the film he is gradually embraced by the mining community, who treat him as one of their own. He has not seen his mother for over a decade, but the film's events eventually bring them back into contact with one another. Cliff is an older man from the mining town and central to the process by which the gay activists are accepted by the community. Towards

the end of the film he comes out as gay to Hefina, one of the key organisers in the town's strike action, in the following exchange:

Cliff: I'm gay.

Hefina: I know. I've known for a little while now, love.

Cliff: Since the gays arrived?

Hefina: Well, I can't speak for the rest of the village. But – speaking for myself – since about 1968.

The storylines of Cliff and Gethin mirror each other – both have suppressed and hidden one side of their identities while embracing the other, and both find a way to integrate the two and live by both of them by the end of the film.

The film's final scene takes place a few months after the end of the strike, at the 1985 Gay Pride parade in London. The LGSM activists are getting ready for the march, when they are told by an organiser that no political slogans will be allowed in the main march, and the group therefore has to march either without their banner, or 'at the back, with the fringe groups.' The group's disappointed mood is soon interrupted by the arrival of the miners' van, however, and the two groups have a happy reunion – with one of the older Welsh women asking 'where are my lesbians?' as she gets off the van. Busloads of miners then arrive, having travelled to London to show their support for LGSM, forcing the organisers to allow LGSM and their large support group to march at the front. This scene is followed by a sequence mixing footage of the film's protagonists with actual newsreel footage of the 1985 Pride march. As the group marches against the backdrop of the Palace of Westminster, the footage is overlaid with text telling us what happened to key characters, as well as with the following excerpts:

A year after the strike ended, a motion was tabled at the Labour Party Conference to enshrine gay and lesbian rights into the Party's manifesto.

Although the motion had been raised before, this time it was passed.

This was due, in part, to a block vote of total approval from one key union – The National Union of Mineworkers.

Finally, the camera zooms in on a Welsh miners' banner depicting two hands clasping each other – referenced multiple times throughout the film – and then the screen fades into black.

The film's end scenes had the same effect on me that *I, Daniel Blake* seemed to have on everyone who saw the film – the images of dozens and dozens of working-class miners descending from the buses to support LGSM and attend the Gay Pride march made me cry not only the first time, but also the second time I watched the film with a much more analytical eye and attitude. My affective response was certainly not only due to the alignment between my own political views and those of the film's protagonists – here both the miners and the gay activists. No doubt it also had to do with a set of affective attachments cultivated in the film, akin to those that *I, Daniel Blake* relies on, as I argued centrally in Chapter 4. The affective attachments that *Pride* solicits from its viewers are, similarly, structured around nostalgia – here nostalgia both for a time when class and sexual politics were simpler and more clear-cut and, in my case, also for another version of my own youth, where my class and sexual politics could be seamlessly integrated into one, like in the storylines of Gethin and Cliff. The class-based political subjectivities represented by the miners, as well as the sexual ones represented by the LGSM activists, appear as emblems of a bygone era but, importantly, for very different reasons and in very different ways.

It is telling that I did not cry when the LGSM activists descended onto the mining town, but only when the miners, in turn, descended onto the Gay Pride march. The film's narrative structure presents the story of the gay activists as central, with the miners and their struggle appearing as a backdrop. That this narrative structure reads as a progress narrative specifically in relation to the gay activists' political struggle is confirmed by the texts exclaiming the political victories that resulted from the actions of the LGSM activists, quoted above. The overwhelming sense of unity and resolve that the film ends with, thus, only makes sense if we attach centrally to the gay activists' story. The miners' story, conversely, ends with the ending of the strike – largely considered a major victory for Thatcher and her Government, as well as a significant contributing factor in the decline of

the trade union movement in the UK.¹⁷⁷ The miners' story, thus, gets no progressive political ending or closure, with their struggle becoming more and more futile in the years following those depicted in the film – whereas the gay activists are seen as part of a broader progressive path, perhaps culminating with the passing of the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act* in 2013. Further, it is specifically the gay *male* activists who are centred in the film, with their lesbian counterparts mostly providing comedic release. The framing of the film's lesbian characters does not, consequently, quite allow them to embody the same kind of explicitly politicised subjectivity inhabited by the gay male activists.

It is no surprise – or, perhaps, accident – that *Pride* was released in the middle of the austerity era, just as the harshest effects of many austerity policies were beginning to be felt – as well as only just over a year after the Marriage Act received royal assent. It is precisely in *this time* that it makes sense to discursively leave behind the working-class struggles of the 1980s and beyond, as the film arguably does, with their attachments to class-based political identities that no longer match the political realities of the present – while at the same time celebrating the many political victories of LG(b) movements since the 1980s. Ben Walters argues in an opinion piece on the film *Pride* that it is part of a broader 'backward turn' in LGBT cinema, representing 'a moment of taking stock':

In recent years, in the industrialised world, the struggle for LGBT rights has become closely bound to the pursuit of equal access to institutions such as marriage and military service. Now that those goals seem to have been substantively achieved, there's space to breathe and become reacquainted – or, for younger audiences, acquainted for the first time – with facets of past queer experience that might be useful in preparing for whatever is to come. (2016)

Arguably some younger activists have gone on to do exactly what Walters suggests, with the group 'Gays and Lesbians Support the Migrants' (LGSM)

¹⁷⁷ The coal industry was, further, eventually privatised in the 1990s, and former coalmining towns are amongst some of the poorest areas in austerity era UK (Foden et al. 2014).

founded shortly after the film's release.¹⁷⁸ This looking back or 'taking stock' is, however, structured differently in the case of the film's two groups of activists.

The temporality of *Pride's* framings of the two activist groups is decidedly linear – the gay activists are part of a long march towards an inevitable sexually equal future, whereas the miners' struggle appears symbolic of the loss of working-class politics as we know it. While the story of *Pride's* gay activists 'becomes a repository for [--] traces of hope made manifest in a utopian tale of eventual and inexorable progress', that of the miners' remains mired in 'nostalgia in a dystopian account of inexorable loss' (Hemmings 2018: 22; cf. Hemmings 2011). As I have centrally argued throughout this thesis, however, these discursive framings only make sense if we view sexual politics as inherently belonging to specific, predefined sexual identities and, therefore, innately structured by the homosexual/heterosexual distinction – as well as if we, similarly, view class-based politics as intrinsically structured by particular, clear-cut class identities. Along somewhat similar lines, Clare Hemmings argues that:

In imagining that we know how to ameliorate gendered, racial, and sexual inequalities, or indeed what gender, race, and sexuality *are*, it is easy to miss the profound ambivalence about these terms and the inequalities or pleasures that cluster around them. (2018: 5, emphasis in the original)

The narrative of *Pride's* gay activists is based precisely on such a notion – of the *knowability* of the processes by which sexual inequalities can and should be – as well as, importantly, already have been – ameliorated. The discursive framings of the miners and the gay activists through imaginaries of loss and progress, respectively, thus also functions to hide the 'profound ambivalence' that Hemmings refers to, masking the many *other* possible trajectories for *both* class and sexual politics – which may or may not be determined by identity.

In this thesis I have offered a number of such *other* trajectories, each underpinned by an examination of a particular site in which sexual and

¹⁷⁸ See LGSM on Twitter @lgsmigrants.

intimate lives, subjects, and politics are being made (im)possible, (il)legible, or (il)legitimate within the context of austerity politics in the UK. Throughout my analysis I have shown that this takes place through many discursive and regulatory mechanisms that are not centrally sutured to sexual identity categories or the homosexual/heterosexual distinction – or, indeed, the material/cultural distinction as Chapter 3 suggested. In Chapter 3 I investigated the sexual and gendered assumptions and implications underpinning the ‘cultural poverty’ argument and argued that the processes by which poverty is being increasingly familialised, individualised, and culturalised depend centrally on a notion of an idealised, generational and reproductive, heteronormativity. In Chapter 4 I argued that the figuration of the ‘benefit scrounger’ or ‘benefit recipient’ becomes legible through processes of sexualisation and racialisation to such an extent that imaginaries of deservingness of social welfare remain tied to particular, sexualised and racialised, frames of authenticity through which this figuration is continuously assessed and judged. Finally, in Chapter 5 my focus was on welfare and housing policies and practices that materialise in the lives of affected individuals as a series of intimate disruptions, which were shown to entail significant judgements of the value of different kinds of intimacies, as well as to engender certain conditions of unliveability. Here, similarly to Hemmings, my task has been ‘a politically motivated one that starts from an interest in what is left out of the frame’ (2018: 17) – in my case specifically the frame of sexual identity.

Importantly, however, my point has not been to claim that sexual (or other) identities have somehow *dissipated* – a notion that Heather Love argues blinds scholars ‘to the tenacity of this concept both in history and in individual subjectivity’ (2009: 44). Identity remains an important organising concept both in political structures and in individual experience – and clearly it also matters to me, given my strong affective reaction to the gay activists’ storyline in *Pride*. Neither has it been to argue for the greater importance of *other* identity categories, such as class-based ones, over sexual identities. As James Clifford argues, rather than preceding political participation, identity is ‘made and unmade, connected and disconnected, in

the interactive arenas of democratic, national, and transnational social life' (2000: 95). People become political subjects *through* their 'social and historical connections and disconnections' (*ibid.*: 96), and politics is, therefore, not so much about mobilising existing identities but about the processes by which these connections and disconnections are forged. For Clifford, identity politics itself is, thus, also open-ended and 'fraught with ambivalence' (*ibid.*: 95), and analyses of such politics need to acknowledge its foundation in a community or group's desire to 'make "room" for themselves in a crowded world' (*ibid.*: 96). While much could, no doubt, also be said about the shifting terrain of (sexual) *identity* politics in the austerity era, my project has focused specifically on non-identitarian deployments of sexuality within the discursive and regulatory mechanisms of austerity – and, consequently, on non-identitarian modes of sexual politics. Rather than to question identity politics as such, my aim here has been to problematise predefined identity categories as the *only* legible and legitimate basis for a sexual politics.

In each case my analysis has, thus, also been intended to help us think sexual politics in the austerity era differently – outside of the teleological narratives of progress that imaginaries of sexual politics tend to attach to, such as in the film *Pride*. In Chapter 3 I argued that the processes by which (class) politics are increasingly 'displaced' by 'cultural' concerns are not the result of an over-emphasis on sexual and gender identities, or on identity politics more broadly, as is often claimed, but rather that of an *under-emphasis* on sexuality (as well as gender, race, *and* class) as part of regimes of material inequality. I then suggested that the inequalities that arise due to austerity politics are, perhaps, usefully thought of as *sexual inequalities*, thereby intentionally bringing sexuality into discursive framings of material inequality. In Chapter 4 I examined the 'benefit scrounger' figuration and argued that the possibility of her appearing as a normatively intelligible political subjectivity is foreclosed by the discursive processes that sexualise and racialise her, and consign her to frames of immorality and criminality; and in Chapter 5 I argued that the increasing intrusion of the state into the intimate lives of poor and/or working-class

populations is the consequence of the blurring of the boundaries between the state itself and the many private and local actors now responsible for various aspects of statework – with significant consequences for how political action against these processes might be thought of. In both chapters I then went on to argue that – despite the significant limitations – a *politics of refusal* is both possible and evident within the discursive and regulatory processes examined.

Scholarly (as well as other) analyses of neoliberalising political contexts – such as that of austerity – frequently treat neoliberalism as total and all encompassing. Many of these accounts verge on the dystopian, as they focus on neoliberalism unfolding ‘a vision of the world seen, unhappily, as taking space’ (Cooper 2014: 30), creating a temptation to ‘locate change for the better in some other and – usually for optimistic projects – future time’ (*ibid.*: 223). This temporal configuration of politics as something that happens somewhere else or in some other time, rather than in the here and now, is based on an understanding of politics as something that takes place against ‘an already completed ideological formation or political project’ (Newman 2014: 3302). As Rita Felski states, bestowing one’s political hopes purely on a ‘future to come’, thus, carries the risk of rendering ‘the multiple hues of the present’ ‘into a monotone shade of gray’ (2015: 145). Throughout this thesis I have tried to avoid flattening the present into a reality entirely enclosed by and within the logics and rationalities and austerity, and aimed to, instead, highlight some more *varied shades*, exemplified in the alternative political logics and imaginaries already available in the present.

Both the ‘benefit scrounging’ characters of *I, Daniel Blake* and *Benefits Street*, examined in Chapter 4, and the street-level bureaucrats responsible for delivering some of the most punitive welfare and housing policies, discussed in Chapter 5, engage – or at least have the *potential* to engage – in a politics of refusal that is firmly grounded in the present. This, at the very least, indicates that the neoliberalising logics of austerity can be in various ways resisted, challenged, negotiated, appropriated, and ignored. Their politics are not about campaigning for future changes, or about proposing

future policy amendments. Rather, they are about the everyday, quotidian, almost mundane actions that ameliorate the harshest effects and most subjugating logics of the current political situation and, therefore, also *create the conditions for a different future* – even if just temporarily. Tina Campt offers a response to the dominant logics that have refused a futurity to marginalised communities – in her case, specifically, black subjects – and argues for a ‘grammar of black feminist futurity that [--] moves beyond a simple definition of the future tense as *what will be* in the future’, striving instead ‘for the tense of possibility that grammarians refer to as the future real conditional or *that which will have **had to happen***’ (2017: 17, emphases and bold in the original). The acts of refusal discussed above echo Campt’s notion of ‘a performance of a future that hasn’t yet happened but must’ (*ibid.*: 17), offering both much-needed improvements to the austerity present and ‘a resource for the political imagination’ (Muñoz 2009: 189) for the future.

A state bureaucrat who bends the rules to make life more liveable for a welfare claimant, or a single mother who refuses the dehumanising logics of the welfare system, thus, both exhibit nuggets of ‘the potential that resides within different nows as they gesture toward different futures’ (Cooper 2014: 220). While these readings of the political in the context of austerity echo the notion of *prefigurative* politics, they are not necessarily intentional or planned in the sense that many prefigurative political projects are.¹⁷⁹ They, nonetheless, signal the complexity of the present, as well as that of potential futures, refusing to conform both to the present logics and to the future imaginaries of austerity. While my analysis has focused on just three examples – as well as purely on *dominant* policy and cultural formations – I am not suggesting that these are the *limits* of the political in the context of austerity. If anything, the minor examples of ways of thinking sexual politics differently included here should indicate that ‘the contours of the present are never fully knowable’ (Hemmings 2018: 25) – thus suggesting that, while the dominant discursive and regulatory frameworks

¹⁷⁹ On the notion of prefiguration and on prefigurative politics, see Berlant (2011), Cooper (2014, 2016a, 2017), Newman (2013), and Weeks (2011).

of austerity certainly seek to prescribe a particular kind of future, other kinds of futures are already available, or *being made*, in the present. Rather than summarise the argument of the thesis so far in any more detail, in the rest of this brief concluding chapter I continue thinking through and with these alternative imaginaries of *the political*.¹⁸⁰

A Scene of Protest: Part Two

In August 2011 England saw what has been described as ‘the worst bout of civil unrest in a generation’ (Lewis et al. 2011: 1). Between the sixth and the 11th of the month an estimated 14,000 people engaged in looting and violence across the country, mostly concentrating on bigger cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool, but also affecting smaller cities and towns across the country. A large proportion of the ‘rioters’ were young people – 30 per cent of those interviewed for the research conducted jointly by *The Guardian* and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) (*ibid.*: 13) were under 18, and a further 49 per cent were aged between 18 and 24. They were from mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds, and close to 20 per cent of them were female (*ibid.*: 13-14). The event that sparked what has come to be known as the ‘2011 England riots’ had taken place two days before the start of the ‘unrest’ – the shooting dead of unarmed 29-year-old Mark Duggan by a police officer in Tottenham, London. The ‘riots’, as well as the discursive responses to them both within the media and amongst politicians, have been the subject of much scholarly interest, and my intention here is not to replicate these analyses.¹⁸¹ Rather, I want to end this thesis with a discussion of some of the ways in which *the political* – or a *desire* for it – could be configured in and through the ‘riots.’

Imogen Tyler (2013) insists firmly on understanding the ‘riots’ as a *political* event, against a discursive backdrop that, almost without exception, painted the ‘rioters’ behaviour as ‘pure criminality’ (Cameron 2011), ‘chaos

¹⁸⁰ For more in-depth summaries of the arguments made in the previous three chapters, see the concluding sections in each of them.

¹⁸¹ On the ‘riots’ themselves, as well as for analyses of some of the explanations offered for them in the subsequent media and political discussions, see Allen and Taylor (2012), Bond-Taylor (2014), De Benedictis (2012), Gillies (2012), Jensen (2012), Shildrick et al. (2016), and Tyler (2013).

and dysfunctionality' (Ian Duncan Smith quoted in Mulholland 2011), and 'mindless violence and thuggery' (David Cameron in HC Deb 2011: c1053), or as the actions of 'feral kids' (Riddell 2011), 'the underclass' (*ibid.*), or simply 'scum' (Johnston 2011).¹⁸² The responses tended to reproduce much of the 'cultural poverty' argument and 'underclass' discourse examined in Chapters 3 and 4, with the looting, criminality, and violence attributed primarily to bad parenting, growing up without a father, and cultures of dysfunctionality. Prime Minister David Cameron stated in his address to the House of Commons on August 11th:

This is not about poverty; it is about culture – a culture that glorifies violence, shows disrespect to authority and says everything about rights but nothing about responsibilities. In too many cases, the parents of these children – if they are still around – do not care where their children are or who they are with, let alone what they are doing. The potential consequences of neglect and immorality on this scale have been clear for too long, without enough action being taken. (HC Deb 2011: c1054)

In a speech on August 15th he continued: 'I don't doubt that many of the rioters out last week have no father at home. [--] we need more urgent action, too, on the families that some people call "problem", others call "troubled"' (2011). Akin to my analysis in Chapter 3, sexualised judgements and assumptions were, thus, centrally drawn upon to paint the 'rioters' as part of a both culturally and morally dysfunctional 'underclass.'

These discursive framings are confirmed in the responses to a poll conducted by *The Guardian* (Lewis et al. 2011: 11) on public perceptions of the causes of the 'riots', with 'poor parenting', 'criminality', and 'moral decline' voted as the top three causes by the paper's readers. The opinions of the 'rioters' themselves, however, stand in significant contrast to these views – here 'poverty', 'policing', and 'Government policy' appear as the top three explanations (*ibid.*: 11).¹⁸³ For those who engaged in the 'riots', therefore, the events appear as resolutely political, with one interviewee

¹⁸² For more detail and a discussion of the various 'dehumanising epithets' used to refer to the rioters in media and political commentary, see Connolly (2011).

¹⁸³ The only major overlap can be found in 'unemployment' – coming up as the fourth most significant cause in both *The Guardian* poll and the views of the 'rioters' themselves (Lewis et al. 2011: 11).

stating decidedly: 'I still to this day don't class it as a riot [--], I think it was a protest' (quoted in *ibid.*: 24). The *Guardian* and LSE research frames 'a long-burning frustration and anger with the police' (*ibid.*: 18) as the first key factor behind the events themselves, as well as central to explaining the link between the actions of the 'rioters' and the shooting of Mark Duggan – which the researchers argue 'symbolised the most extreme end of a spectrum of targeted, unjust and brutal treatment to which they perceive they are subjected' (*ibid.*: 18). Secondly, the 'riots' expressed 'a pervasive sense of injustice' (*ibid.*: 24), whether about poverty, inequality, or social stigmatisation and subjugation, with many interviewees directly mentioning welfare cuts and especially the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Thirdly, the researchers highlight varied motivations for why the 'rioting' materialised specifically as looting, with many talking about stealing consumer items as 'getting their "just rewards"', [--] reacting to a society fuelled by greed, resenting being excluded from a consumerist world and placing some of the blame on big business and advertising' (*ibid.*: 28).

Lauren Berlant argues that within the conditions of neoliberalising precarity, 'there is little room for imagining revolution or indeed any future beyond the scavenging present' (2011: 179). Some of the people who took part in the 'riots' seem to confirm her view, with one interviewee responding to a question about what he would like to see change with nonchalance: 'dunno, don't really care about that no more. I've gone past caring. Just think there's no point in me wishing, wanting things to happen' (quoted in Lewis et al. 2011: 26).¹⁸⁴ For these (mostly) young people, a blind faith in the traditional mechanisms for achieving political change, or in the

¹⁸⁴ Similar sentiments of defeat or dispassion in regards to the future were also expressed by others:

All I can tell you is that me, myself and the group I was in, none of us have got jobs, yeah? I been out of work now coming up two years ... and it's just like a depression, man, that you sink into ... I felt like I needed to be there as well to just say 'Look, this is what's gonna happen if there's no jobs offered to us out there. (quoted in Lewis et al. 2011: 25)

When no one cares about you you're gonna eventually make them care, you're gonna cause a disturbance. (quoted in *ibid.*: 25)

state's reciprocity, simply makes no sense. This is especially the case given not only that austerity and neoliberalisation have led to worsening inequalities and poverty as Chapter 1 detailed, but also that these effects tend to make themselves felt in the everyday, as a mood, atmosphere, or affect – thereby also conditioning future expectations, as discussed in the introduction. Perhaps, as Rebecca Coleman suggests, the 'rioters' can, thus, be seen through a lens of *refusal* – as refusing a futurity and, instead, accepting or even embracing 'the diminished future that austerity has created' (2016: 97) – in contrast to the claims of many commentators that they have 'lost touch with their own future' (Nick Clegg cited in *ibid.*: 96).

Berlant (2011) suggests, further, that politics in mass democracy requires a split between attachment and expectation – we continue to attach fervently to the rituals and mechanisms of democracy, despite the growing futility of doing so. The young people who chose to engage in the 'riots' had, conversely, left such attachments behind, choosing instead to engage in a kind of *politics of the present* that holds no particular claims for particular futures. In the remainder of this chapter I want to explore the possibility that such a 'politics of the present' centrally both depends on and animates a *desire* for the political. The previous chapters have illustrated multiple ways in which the discursive and regulatory actions of the state (and other actors) can inhibit or limit the kinds of intimate and sexual lives that are possible in the austerity context. However, my suggestion here is that desire and intimacy in the time of austerity are not just about the discursive and regulatory operation of austerity – they do not *belong* to the state or, for instance, to the dominant discursive frameworks that demonise welfare recipients, so to speak. Rather – and, perhaps, rather controversially – I want to think through whether the 'riots' could allow us to imagine ways of locating desire and intimacy in the sphere of the political, too.

The *Guardian* and LSE research strongly disputes the Government's view, much circulated and discussed in the media, that 'at the heart of all the violence sits the issue of the street gangs' (Cameron in HC Deb 2011: c1054). It was also suggested that the ephemeral 'gangs' were responsible for coordinating the looting and the attacks on the police (Lewis et al. 2011),

whereas, in fact, the days of the 'riots' saw an unprecedented truce form between many gangs. Many interviewees expressed 'surprise, and often delight, that during the riots the postcode warfare that was for them a fact of life had – for a short time – melted away' (*ibid.*: 22). One interviewee describes his experience of the 'truce': 'there weren't no gangs. I didn't know no one there, but we all got together that day, the Asians, the blacks, the whites. It felt like we were like one big gang' (quoted in *ibid.*: 23), and another suggests that during the days of the 'riots', 'everyone was smiling. It was literally a festival with no food, no dancing, no music but a free shopping trip for everyone' (quoted in *ibid.*: 28). The 'rioters' express joy and pleasure at the momentary intimacies created in the space of the 'riots', their comments reminiscent of Berlant's notion of *the political* as 'that which magnetizes a desire for intimacy, sociality, affective solidarity, and happiness' – as separate from *politics* as 'a scene of antagonism' (2011: 252). Here 'affective life slops over onto [--] political life' (Berlant and Warner 1998: 560), as intimate, if not erotic, relationships are formed with friends, acquaintances, and strangers – and even enemies – in the heat of the riotous moment.

As they protested against a myriad of injustices and participated in unusual – but no doubt pleasurable – intimacies, the 'rioters' also confronted some of the logics of austerity politics. These logics have tended to either harness the intimate sphere to stand in for a sanitised and normative image of an increasingly privatised and familialised citizenship, as I argued in Chapter 3; or to establish it as a site of intensifying state-mandated disruption, as I argued in Chapter 5. Against this backdrop, engaging in the 'riots', perhaps, also provided those who participated with a rare opportunity to engage in kinds of sociality and intimacy that are rarely available to them, both *with* each other, and *against* a perceived common enemy – the police and/or the Government. Further, Berlant's suggestion that 'one "does politics" to be in the political with others' (2011: 260) is relevant here. The intimacies created and sustained through the 'riots' animate not just a desire for the political, but also a desire to be in the political *with others*. Thus, as well as a chance to protest, the instance itself

also certainly provided something important to the protesters, in the form of altered paths for, and alternative imaginaries of, intimacy, desire, and pleasure.

Eve Cherniavsky asks pointedly: ‘how do we measure ground gained against forms of political power that are indifferent to the disposition of our hearts and minds?’ (2017: 176). She discusses the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, exploring Douglas Rushkoff’s formulation of the movement ‘not [as] a game that someone wins, but rather a form of play that is successful the more people get to play, and the longer the game is kept going’ (2011).¹⁸⁵ For Cherniavsky, OWS challenges an understanding of politics as representation – in both senses of the word, as it neither seeks to stand in for an anonymous mass of participants, nor casts its participants as pre-constituted political subjects. Instead, the subject imagined is ‘a kind of hologram – a projection of how one might choose to move in the world’ (Cherniavsky 2017: 194). While OWS and the England ‘riots’ seem, in many ways, a world apart, could something akin to both Cherniavsky’s ‘hologram’ and Rushkoff’s ‘play’ be found within the ‘riots’ and the subjectivities they brought into being, no matter how temporarily? After all, while the ‘rioters’ were certainly engaged in a form of protest, this was no traditional protest, aimed at changing the law, a particular policy, or even public opinion. Rather, the ‘success’ – if it can, indeed, be called that – of the ‘riots’ for the ‘rioters’ themselves can be found in the sustained time period in which *they* were in control, and not the police, nor the Government – as exemplified in one interviewee’s statement: ‘normally the police control us. But the law was obeying us, know what I mean?’ (quoted in Lewis et al. 2011: 23).

The ‘rioters’, like the OWS protesters, ‘no longer exist at the level of political institutions, and so find themselves compelled to devise other arenas in which collectively to conceive and cultivate modes of political identification and political agency’ (Cherniavsky 2017: 178). In the arena created – and sustained for almost a week – by the ‘rioters’, they had access to consumer goods, intimacies, and political subjectivities, as well as a level

¹⁸⁵ See also Bhattacharyya (2015) and Gibson-Graham (2006) for discussions of politics that do not begin with the aim of capturing power, for instance from the state.

of freedom from both police interference and ‘postcode warfare’, that they could normally only fantasise about. Of course this arena also included many actions that would be characterised by most as bad, immoral, or unethical – and my intention here is certainly not to condone such actions. However, despite the fact that, for many of the ‘rioters’, the ‘hologram’ or projection of a way of moving in the world they created was violent, they, nonetheless, for several days ‘simulated an alternate plane of political life, outside the ruined institutions of modern democratic politics’ (*ibid.*: 194). Thus, although not intentionally aiming at a specific kind of future with their protest and/or play – as, for instance, the protesters of *Pride* did – the ‘rioters’ could perhaps be seen as inhabiting a prefigurative political praxis, propelling a different kind of world into temporarily existing – while at the same time refusing the futurity prescribed for them by the logics of austerity. In the words of Campt, they at the same time *refused* and *affirmed* their ‘capacity to inhabit a future against all odds’ (2017: 113).

The ‘riots’, thus, tell us something important about the desire for the political in the era of austerity. The ‘rioters’ – as well as the other refusing subjects explored throughout this thesis – have chosen to disengage from the scenes and mechanisms of traditional politics, the promises of which hold little meaning to them. Rather than admit defeat and entirely succumb to the austerity present, however, they express their desire for the political in other arenas, creating other kinds of intimacies, other kinds of subjectivities, and flashes of other imaginaries of the future along the way. These expressions allow for a rethinking of intimacy and desire in ways that suggest they can be wrestled away from the hands of the state and its discursive and regulatory mechanisms, as well as in ways that do not bind them to the imaginaries and logics of specific, predefined identity categories. They do not constitute ‘resistance’, or even ‘politics’, in any traditional sense and, in fact, to frame them as such would be to not only mischaracterise them, but also position them *within* the political imaginaries of austerity.

The juxtaposition between the scene of protest depicted in *Pride*, and those enacted by the ‘rioters’ of 2011, thus, allows for a reimagining of what sexual or intimate politics in the era of austerity might look like, as well as

brings this thesis to a close. In the conditions created by and within austerity politics, many kinds of sexual and intimate lives are made illegible and illegitimate, and many kinds of futures are foreclosed for those most intensely and intimately affected by austerity's discursive and regulatory frameworks. Perhaps, in these conditions, when the rational, reasonable, and well-travelled paths of protest are not available – or turn out to be nothing but cruel optimism – it is the *desire* for the political that matters above all. In enacting their desire for the political, the many subjects of this thesis did not change – or even aim to change – the world but, instead, refused the dominant logics and rationalities of austerity altogether. These desires – and the resulting pleasures – at the very least indicate a 'stubborn [--] refusal to give out, wear out, or admit defeat', suggesting, as Berlant does, that 'optimism might not be cruel at all, but the bare minimum evidence of not having given up on social change as such' (2011: 259). Perhaps in austerity politics, and in light of bleak austerity futures, such a 'stubborn refusal' is more than it seems – a moment of respite, an alleviation, a flash of unlikely intimacy, evidence that there is more to (sexual) life than what is prescribed by austerity politics, or a desire for a different kind of future, here and now.

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